

Opening Statement by Ranking Member Tom McClintock
House Committee on Natural Resources
Sub-Committee on Water, Oceans and Wildlife
May 1, 2019

The sub-committee meets today to hear testimony on the state of our fisheries.

Recreational and commercial fishing industries are significant drivers of the U.S. economy. Together, the U.S. seafood industry and the recreational fishing industry generate **\$208 billion** in sales impacts and contribute \$97 billion to the U.S. gross domestic product.¹

The sustainable management of our American fisheries is of utmost importance to these sectors of our economy, the tens of thousands of families that depend on it for their livelihoods and the millions of consumers who depend on it for their dinner tables.

The importance of this subject requires a clear-eyed and accurate assessment of conditions and stocks.

According to NOAA, “91 percent of stocks for which we have assessments are not subject to overfishing and 84 percent are not overfished.”²

Further, nearly 90 percent of federally managed fisheries fall below their annual catch limits,³ meaning that our commercial and recreational fishermen are not being allowed to harvest at maximum sustainable levels.

¹ U.S. Department of Commerce: *Fisheries Economics of the United States 2015*. May 2017

² Testimony of Chris Oliver, Assistant Administrator for the National Marine Fisheries Service, to the House Committee on Natural Resources, September 26, 2017

³ http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/laws_policies/msa/

According to testimony received in 2013 by this sub-committee from Dr. Ray Hilborn, a professor of marine science at the University of Washington, “[t]he major threat to sustainable jobs, food, recreational opportunities and revenue from U.S. marine fisheries is no longer overfishing, but underfishing.”⁴

We will hear testimony today from both the recreational and commercial fishing industries that lack of access has been the major contributor to this underutilization of our fishery resources. In recent years, access for commercial and recreational fishing has eroded due to poor science, overbearing regulations, and abuse of Marine Protected Areas – such as Marine National Monuments and Marine Sanctuaries – that often prohibit various fishing activities.

Massive expansions of off-limits designations by both the Bush and Obama administrations are a big part of the problem that needs to be fully examined and remedied. For example, in August, 2016, a single designation expanded the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Marine National Monument to an area three times the size of the state of California.

Opponents of the expansion, such as former U.S. Senator Daniel Akaka and former Hawaii Governor George Ariyoshi, saw it as an act of federal overreach that would harm native Hawaiian livelihoods and cultural practices. Akaka and Ariyoshi further suggested that such an expansion would impact Hawaii’s ability to follow through with trust responsibilities to island natives.⁵

The very next month, the administration designated the first ever Marine National Monument off the Atlantic coast, shutting off nearly

⁴⁴ [Testimony of Ray Hilborn, Professor at the University of Washington, given to the House Committee on Natural Resources, September 11, 2013](#)

⁵ [Daniel Akaka, George Ariyoshi, Benjamil Cayetano letter to Barack Obama, Proposed Expansion of Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, July 22, 2016](#)

5,000 square miles of ocean to any economic activity, including commercial fishing and energy exploration.⁶

These closures of vast amounts of federal waters to U.S. fishermen have done nothing but promote foreign fishing fleets that often sit and harvest seafood right outside of the bounds of these monuments.

Rigid, over-prescriptive federal fisheries management framework and shutting U.S. fishermen out of massive swaths of productive fishing grounds have directly contributed to the seafood trade imbalance and, in effect, promoted foreign fisheries. These same foreign fisheries utilize forced labor, unsafe and unsustainable fishing practices, and mislabeling of products entering American markets to compete with American fishermen.

The best way to combat foreign bad actors is to loosen the stranglehold we have needlessly imposed on U.S. industry. Last Congress, with bipartisan support, the House passed H.R. 200, *the Strengthening Fishing Communities and Increasing Flexibility in Fisheries Management Act*. This legislation was composed of provisions aimed at getting better fisheries data to federal managers so that they can make informed decisions regarding our nation's fisheries and afforded the necessary tools to regional fishery managers to tailor fishery management plans to the unique characteristics of their region; promotes transparency in fishery science and management. Sadly, this measure died in the Senate for lack of 60 votes for consideration.

Sound science, accurate assessments and sensible policy – rather than scaremongering and hysteria -- is essential for policies that will assure the continued success of the U.S. Fishing industry and the sustainable management of our American fisheries.

⁶ [Washington Post: Obama designated the first-ever marine monument off of the East Coast, in New England, September 15, 2016](#)