

**OPENING STATEMENT**

**Chairman Jared Huffman**

**Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife**

**Committee on Natural Resources**

**Legislative Hearing on H.R. 1834, H.R. 2236, H.R. 4679, H.R. 4723, H.R. 5126, and H.R.**

**5548**

**January 14, 2019**

Good morning. Thank you all for joining us today at WOW's first hearing of the new year.

As many of you know, one of my top priorities in this committee is the sustainability of our nation's fisheries. Our oceans and fishing communities across the country are facing challenges from climate change and other man-made problems, and we need real solutions. I'm pleased that we have a lineup of bipartisan bills today for our consideration, and I'm proud to be the lead sponsor of two of them: the Salmon Focused Investments in Sustainable Habitats Act, which identifies and protects pristine salmon habitats, and the Fishery FUND Act, which improves the Fishery Disaster Relief program so that we can get assistance to impacted communities in a timely manner. During our first panel, I'll go into further detail about those two bills, but right now I'd like to give an overview of the other legislation before us today.

Coral reefs are vital habitat for many commercially important fisheries, as well as hubs for tourism and recreation. Unfortunately, studies show that certain chemicals in sunscreens, oxybenzone and octinoxate [*octi-NOX-ate*], can have toxic effects on coral, including increased risk of bleaching and abnormal growth. Representative Rooney's bill, H.R. 1834, would prohibit the use of sunscreens containing oxybenzone and octinoxate in national marine sanctuaries, ensuring that coral reefs in our protected areas have the best shot at survival.

Sunscreens without these potentially harmful chemicals are readily available at comparable prices, so this is a common-sense solution for visitors to our beautiful national marine sanctuaries. All that being said, I would like to see an amendment to the bill to include a finding to make it clear that skin cancer is a serious threat and everyone should use sunscreen to protect themselves.

Next, we will discuss Congresswoman Dingell's Forage Fish Conservation Act. Forage fish are small, schooling, plankton-eating fish, such as anchovies, sardines, menhaden, herring, squid, and krill. Forage fish make up one third of the global wild marine fish catch. These species are sensitive to environmental conditions and naturally go through boom and bust cycles, but fishing pressure can make it difficult for their populations to rebound. Their natural predators, like larger fish, sea lions, whales, and seabirds, depend on them, so when forage fish populations are low, these animals suffer as well. While several Fishery Management Councils, including the Mid-Atlantic, Pacific, and the North Pacific Fishery Management Councils, have taken important steps on this issue with precautionary management measures, many forage fish species populations remain low. For example, the crucially important [Pacific sardine](#) and [northern anchovy](#) have experienced about a 95 percent decline in population since 2006. Representative Dingell's bill would address these issues by directing NOAA fisheries and the councils to implement more proactive management of forage fish species. I look forward to discussing this legislation to ensure we are taking the right steps to manage forage fish without any unintended consequences.

Climate change poses another challenge to fisheries management, which I've heard a lot about on my listening tour. Whether it's rapidly shifting stocks in the Atlantic or warm ocean blobs in the Pacific, climate change is already having a significant impact on U.S. fisheries. Shifting stocks, in particular, create huge problems for management and catch allocation on the Atlantic coast. It is unclear how fishery management councils can and will address these changes, but we clearly need to get moving. Representative Cunningham's H.R. 4679 would direct the GAO to report to Congress on efforts by the councils, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, and NOAA Fisheries to prepare for and adapt to climate change. This is an important first step.

Finally, I'm excited to discuss Representative Graves' DESCEND Act, a bill that I cosponsored to require descending devices when fishing for reef fish. Descending devices include weighted hooks, lip clamps, and release boxes that help fish return to depth without causing damage to their swim bladders. These devices help reduce mortality of reef fishes like snapper and grouper, helping to sustain important populations.

The legislation before us today aims to make our oceans and fisheries more sustainable in the face of man-made threats. As we see more headlines of marine heat waves, bleached coral reefs, and the increasing impact of climate change on fisheries, it is our job in Congress to investigate these issues and to offer solutions, which these bills aim to do. I'll now turn it over to our Ranking Member for his remarks, and then we will hear from the lead sponsors of these bills.