

Questions of the Honorable Debbie Dingell  
House Committee on Natural Resources

HEARING

Legislative Hearing on Fishery Legislation including H.R. 2236, the  
Forage Fish Conservation Act

January 14, 2020

OPENING STATEMENT

Thank you, Chairman Huffman and Ranking Member McClintock, for convening this important hearing to discuss bipartisan legislation to strengthen our nation's fisheries.

Forage fish - smaller fish that serve as prey for other recreationally and commercially important species such as tuna, salmon, and cod - are vital for sustaining a healthy marine ecosystem.

However, the numbers of many of these fish have declined dramatically in recent years and are at historic lows. For example, coast-wide landings of shad and river herring have fallen by more than 96 percent since 1950.

Additionally, human demand for these fish species has continued to grow.

These increased pressures, if not addressed soon, will threaten opportunities for recreational fisherman as well as the larger marine ecosystem.

To maintain healthy and abundant fisheries in the coming years, we must work to strengthen science-based mechanisms for fisheries management that build upon the success of Magnuson-Stevens and other proven conservation measures.

This is why the Forage Fish Conservation Act is necessary.

The legislation creates a national, science-based definition for forage fish in federal waters, ensures that scientific advice sought by fishery managers includes recommendations for forage fish, while preserving state management of forage fish fisheries that occur in their jurisdiction.

Additionally, the legislation assesses the impact any new commercial forage fish fishery could have on existing fisheries, fishing communities, and the marine ecosystem prior to the fishery being authorized.

Taken together, the provisions in the Forage Fish Conservation Act would implement a consistent fisheries conservation policy throughout the eight fisheries management councils.

This will allow Americans can enjoy healthier ecosystems that support thriving coastal communities, as well as their associated economies.

The legislation has broad bipartisan support, as well as the backing of a variety of groups including the American Sportfishing Association, the National Marine Manufacturers Association, the National Wildlife Federation, the Pew Charitable Trusts, and the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership.

I would also like to ask unanimous consent to enter into the record a letter signed by over 100 scientists from across the country supporting the Forage Fish Conservation Act.

The need for action is clear, as is the cost of inaction.

By acting now – building upon the success of Magnuson-Stevens’ proven, state-based conservation mechanisms – we can address this pressing need for the benefit of fishing communities and the economy at large.

I would like to thank my colleague, Congressman Brian Mast, for his leadership and support of this legislation as well, and look forward to continuing to work in a bipartisan manner to move the Forage Fish Conservation Act forward.

I urge my colleagues to support this legislation. Thank you and I yield back.