

Opening Statement of Chair Jared Huffman
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife
Legislative Hearing July 29, 2021

The Subcommittee is meeting today to consider 15 bills, 12 of which are bipartisan or Republican-led.

One of the bipartisan bills on the docket today that I am proud to sponsor with my friend, Mr. Graves, is the *Illegal Fishing and Forced Labor Prevention Act*. Illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, or IUU fishing, is a serious, global problem.

As we've discussed previously in this Subcommittee, IUU fishing is closely linked to financial crimes, fraud and mislabeling, human trafficking, and forced labor. A U.S. International Trade Commission report found that nearly 11% of total U.S. seafood imports in 2019 – worth \$2.4 billion – were products of IUU fishing. Not only is this contributing to overfishing and slavery at sea, it is also undercutting honest American fishers who play by the rules and operate the most sustainable fisheries in the world.

The *Illegal Fishing and Forced Labor Prevention Act* addresses IUU fishing comprehensively. It improves the Seafood Import Monitoring Program by expanding its requirements to all species, increasing data requirements, and improving detection of imports at risk of IUU fishing and labor violations. The legislation also establishes seafood traceability and labeling requirements to crack down on seafood fraud, something that consumers have been demanding for years. And among many other provisions, the bill strengthens international fisheries management and expands the definition of IUU fishing to include human trafficking, forced labor, and other labor rights violations.

The Dean of the House, Mr. Young, also has several fisheries bills before us today. The *American Fishery Advisory Committee Act* would establish an advisory committee made of representatives of the seafood harvesting and processing industries to manage awards for fisheries research and development grants. We will also examine the *Prevention of Escapement of Genetically Altered Salmon in the United States Act*, which would place prohibitions on selling, purchasing, and possessing genetically modified salmon and other fish species. And the last bill from the Dean is the *Keep Finfish Free Act*, which would prohibit commercial finfish aquaculture operations in the U.S. EEZ until there is an authorizing statute.

Turning our attention to the other bills before the subcommittee today, the uniting factor is that Congress can do more to aid the critical state of our planet's biodiversity. One million species are threatened with extinction, which should serve as a wakeup call to us all.

While there is no one-size-fits-all solution to the extinction crisis, some of these bills would certainly make a difference, such as Representative Dingell's ambitious *Recovering America's Wildlife Act*, also known as RAWA. It would provide an additional \$1.3 billion in annual, dedicated funding to assist states, territories, and tribes in their efforts to conserve wildlife. Representative Cartwright's *SAFE Act* also takes aim at the climate and biodiversity crises by codifying previous Congressional directives to strategically improve the resilience of fish, wildlife, and plants in the face of climate change.

Overlooked species groups, like monarchs and other butterflies, amphibians, Pacific plants, freshwater mussels, and Southwest desert fish, are particularly vulnerable and need careful attention to ensure their survival. These groups would be helped by resources provided by legislation from Representatives Panetta, Jeffries, and Grijalva. My bill, the *Critically Endangered Animals Conservation Act*, would similarly provide resources to highly at risk species around the world.

Other species groups face specific challenges that demand careful solutions from Congress. The *Bear Protection Act* would help bears by prohibiting the trade of their body parts, which are in high demand on the black market for medicinal purposes. The *Marine Mammal Research and Response Act* would reauthorize the Prescott Program, which ensures that marine mammals in need can be rescued and rehabilitated. Another bill, the *Captive Primate Safety Act*, eliminates the dangerous and inhumane pet trade of primates. These animals are simply not suited for captivity, and owners of these animals are at risk from aggressive behavior and diseases that primates can easily pass to humans.

Finally, just as certain species groups require extra attention, certain ecosystems do as well. Representative Maloney's bill, the *Highlands Conservation Reauthorization Act*, would expand protections for the deciduous and coniferous forests, streams, and lakes of the Highlands in the Northeast. On the opposite coast, the kelp forests on the North Coast of California in my district have decreased by 95 percent – this has had serious impacts on our coastal communities and coastal ecosystem, and we must act now to save them. My bill, the *KELP Act*, would provide restoration grants for kelp recovery.

There is much on the agenda today, and I look forward to discussing these bills at length.