

The Honorable Debbie Dingell
House Committee on Natural Resources

HEARING
Legislative Hearing on Fishery Legislation including H.R. 5770, the
Forage Fish Conservation Act

November 16, 2021

MEMBER TESTIMONY

Thank you, Chairman Huffman and Ranking Member Bentz, for convening today's hearing to discuss legislation to strengthen our nation's fisheries.

I appreciate the Committee's inclusion of the Forage Fish Conservation Act, bipartisan legislation I am leading with my colleague, Congressman Brian Mast.

Forage fish - smaller fish that support 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 gives the Secretary of Commerce the authority to create a science-based definition for forage fish in federal waters and ensures that scientific advice sought by fishery managers includes recommendations for forage fish, all 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 dozens of 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.