

**Opening Statement for Chair Huffman
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife
Hearing on H.R. 4690, the *Sustaining America's Fisheries for
the Future Act*
Tuesday, November 16, 2021**

[773 words, ~4.8 min]

Good afternoon – it's nice to be here again in person with many of you, and I'm grateful to those who have appeared with us virtually from afar.

Today's hearing on the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act reauthorization is years in the making. We have two reauthorization bills before us – mine and Congressman Case's, as well as Congressman Young's. We'll also be examining Congresswoman Dingell's bill on forage fish conservation.

America is truly a leader in sustainable fisheries management, but the MSA hasn't been reauthorized in over a decade and needs important updates, particularly concerning the impacts of climate change.

When I first started drafting the Sustaining America's Fisheries for the Future Act, in partnership with Congressman Case, I knew we needed to change the narrative around fisheries. We wanted the conversation not to be about partisan politics, but to be an inclusive, transparent, and stakeholder driven process so we can get back to the basics and focus on the needs of fishing communities. That all started with hearing directly from the stakeholders, which is why, despite challenges from COVID, I held eight listening sessions around the country and virtually.

We also released a discussion draft version of the bill, which I actively sought comments on to include as much stakeholder feedback as possible.

From the listening sessions to taking comments, we have genuinely heard from stakeholders across the board – commercial, recreational, charter, tribal, and subsistence fishers, environmentalists, scientists, council members and other regulators, processors, the offshore wind industry, and more.

We learned from this process that we need to make some profound changes and updates to the MSA. At the top of the list is climate change – fish stocks are shifting, ecosystems are changing, and how we manage fish needs to change. That means incorporating more climate science, improving coordination, and more strategic planning, all of which are included in this bill. Just last week, several committee members were at COP 26, and we heard how important it is to act on climate change now before it is too late.

We also need to make important updates to the eight regional fishery management councils. This bill includes language that strengthens the public process and transparency, including updates for council ethics requirements, more transparent voting, and strengthening anti-lobbying policies. We also added two seats to the North Pacific council for Alaska Natives, who historically have been far underrepresented. We created voting liaison seats for the New England and Mid Atlantic councils, where stocks often overlap and shift due to climate change.

This legislation is also very heavy on science and data because to keep up with today's fishery management needs, we need to have the best available science. We included language to expand and improve electronic technologies, cooperative research and management updates, and recreational fishing data consistency improvements.

In Title V, we address many critical conservation issues that will make the MSA even more effective as the world's best example of sustainable fisheries management. My bill closes loopholes that prevent effective bycatch management, strengthens protections for essential fish habitat, and amends requirements for fishery rebuilding plan outcomes so that we don't end up in endless rebuilding plan loops. It also includes Representative Dingell's bill on forage fish conservation, which will help us manage foundational species as a food source for other fish and animals in marine ecosystems.

We also incorporated several bipartisan bills into the legislation, including some that go beyond the MSA but are critical for fishing communities and fisheries management. These include Rep. Pingree's Working Waterfronts Act and Rep. Webster's and my Fishery Resource Disasters Improvements Act, which will speed up timelines for getting funds to fishing communities after fishery disasters are declared.

I especially want to thank the Dean of the House, Congressman Don Young, for his decades of leadership on fisheries management and for all the productive conversations we and our staff have had around MSA in the last few years. As he will tell you, he was instrumental in the original writing of the MSA, and it really should have his name attached to it. While our MSA reauthorization bills are different, there is much we agree on, and I hope we can continue to find common ground as we learn from today's hearing.

I'm thrilled that we have such a wide array of witnesses – from NMFS and the Councils to fishers across the commercial, recreational, and subsistence sectors and environmental advocates. We very much appreciate you being here today, and I'm looking forward to learning your thoughts on the Magnuson Stevens Act.

With that, I will turn it over to the Ranking Member for his opening remarks.