

Opening Statement
The Honorable Bruce Westerman
Ranking Member
House Committee on Natural Resources
Before the
Water, Oceans and Wildlife Subcommittee
Legislative Hearing on H.R.59, H.R. 4690, and H.R 5770

Thank you for holding this hearing on reauthorizing the Magnuson-Stevens Act, one of the most important laws under this Committee's jurisdiction.

It may be named after two former Senators, but anyone in the fisheries world knows that our Dean of the House, Don Young, is co-responsible for not only its creation in 1976 but for its continuation. It is only fitting that he's the Acting Subcommittee Ranking Member for this hearing.

He is the true expert in this field, and we are honored to have him here captaining the boat on our side of the aisle.

The MSA law we are looking at today has been reauthorized twice, with a possibility for a third time. As Mr. Young referenced, our laws are not written in stone and it's our duty to review them as needed.

That involves looking at what has worked and what hasn't, which is the scope of this hearing. We will hear today that this landmark fisheries law has helped create world-class opportunities for commercial and recreational anglers alike. Jobs in our coastal areas and even in land-locked communities in Arkansas -- where boat construction flourishes thanks, in part, to recreational fishing in saltwater -- are the direct result of federal fisheries law. And, in many cases, the seafood we enjoy on our dinner plates comes from American waters managed under the law before us.

From some of the witness testimonies here today, it's evident that one of the reasons the law has been successful is that the MSA law empowered regional management that accounted for differences in fisheries, communities, dialogues, history and the like. The regional councils are given National Standards to adhere to, but have the ability to meet those Standards using regional approaches. Mr. Young's bill continues that management style while providing for more flexibility and transparency in the law.

Mr. Young's bill also promotes science. We will hear today that researchers are making great technological advances to measure fish abundance and that the federal government -- at least involving red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico -- has some work to do when it comes to fish counting.

On the other hand, we will hear that Mr. Huffman's reauthorization bill goes in the opposite direction. Instead of empowering councils, it restricts them and gives more power to the federal bureaucracy in Silver Spring, Maryland. It could lead to regulatory chaos and litigation when it comes to changes on federal by-catch standards. The bill also changes the process for potential impacts on essential fish habitat and gives NOAA agency superpower status over other federal agencies. For example, the U.S. Navy has strong concerns over these provisions and is worried about military preparedness and readiness. In addition, given President Biden's current supply chain crisis, enacting provisions which inhibit dredging or port development will make this situation even worse.

In conclusion, both bills – as well as Congresswoman Dingell's bill on forage fisheries which is included in Mr. Huffman's bill – are well-intentioned. But we need to ensure that whatever this Committee does after this hearing does not undermine what has worked for fishing communities.

I again commend Mr. Young for his true leadership on this effort and look forward to today's testimony.