

Congressman Don Young Opening Statement: WOW Subcommittee Legislative Hearing on MSA Reauthorization (November 16, 2021)

Introduction

- Good afternoon. I'd like to thank Representative Huffman for the consideration of my bill, H.R. 59, that would reauthorize Magnuson-Stevens.
- I'd also like to thank Ranking Member Westerman for entrusting me to take the lead on MSA and allowing me to continue the fight to reauthorize a critical piece of legislation, of which I originally helped pass the House 45 years ago in 1976.
- Lastly, I am grateful to Representative Bentz for agreeing to temporarily step aside and let me to act as Ranking Member for this subcommittee hearing.

MSA – Need for 1976 Legislation

- Before 1976, foreign fishing fleets dominated the waters off Alaska's shores.
- Deck lights of foreign vessels — dozens if not more — could be seen just miles off the coast of Kodiak and other coastal communities.
- Recognizing the need for change, countless Alaskan fishermen came to Congress to ask for help in pushing the foreign fleets out.

Bipartisan Effort – Began in the House

- Senator Ted Stevens and I knew that Alaska's and America's interests needed protection and we immediately began working to spearhead commonsense fisheries reforms through Congress.
 - We made a unique push to expand our nation's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) to 200 miles, while limiting state waters to 3 miles.

- Reforms weren't easy, but partnerships and friendships were formed — with Representatives and Senators across state and party lines — to convince our colleagues it was the right thing to do.
 - Rep. Gerry Studds (D-MA) and I led the charge in the House, and the Senate quickly followed suit.

Americanizing our Fisheries

- After years of work, the foundation of our domestic fishing fleet was born from the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA).
- Along with the creation of the 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zone that pushed foreign fleets further from our shores, MSA “Americanized” our fisheries and created wealth and certainty for our State and fishermen.

Alaska – Gold Standard of Fisheries Management

- Alaska is now home to the strongest, most sustainable fisheries in the world.
 - The North Pacific Fisheries Management Council, currently chaired by Simon Kinneen, is considered the gold standard.
- Across the North Pacific, from Dutch Harbor to Ketchikan, our fishermen and coastal communities have thrived under the policies developed in MSA.
- Alaska's seafood industry now contributes nearly 70,000 jobs to our local economies and harvests more than 60 percent of the nation's seafood. In fact, approximately one in ten Alaskans work in the seafood industry!

Reauthorizing MSA – Providing Reforms to Ensure Proper Balance

- As Alaska's fisheries continue to flourish, there ultimately comes a time when our laws — even those that are working well — must be reviewed and updated.
- Since MSA was last reauthorized in 2006, I am once again proud to be at the head of the charge on reauthorizing this important legislation.

H.R. 4690: Sustaining America's Fisheries for the Future Act of 2021 (Huffman)

Although I commend my colleague, Rep. Huffman, for understanding the crucial role MSA plays in the management of our nation's fisheries, I do have concerns with his bill:

- First, this bill would take power from the Councils and put it in the hands of the Secretary, which is a politically appointed position. We must keep science and expertise at the core of how we manage our fisheries.
- Second, I am concerned that increasing restrictions or burdens on our domestic fisheries will make U.S. industry less competitive and will only lead to an increase in imported seafood – much of it coming from countries that have little or no conservation laws. I fear that this will only make the world's fishery problems worse.
- Third, I am concerned about amending the act in ways that will only increase litigation. After the 1996 amendments, NOAA saw an increase in lawsuits and at one point was dealing with over 100 lawsuits. Courts and lawyers should not be managing our fisheries.
- However, I'd like to recognize a provision in Rep. Huffman's bill that would add two Alaska Native Tribal seats to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council. This is a provision that I support, and I am appreciative of Rep. Huffman for including it in his bill and working with the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) to do so. I plan to incorporate a similar provision in my own bill as well.

H.R. 59: Strengthening Fishing Communities and Increasing Flexibility in Fisheries Management Act (Young)

My legislation, H.R. 59, would make a number of improvements to the MSA in order to ensure a proper balance between the biological needs of fish stocks and the economic needs of fishermen and coastal communities. The bill includes a number of modest but necessary reforms:

- Preserves the roles and responsibilities of the Councils by avoiding new, overly burdensome processes and science requirements on fishery managers;

- Adds flexibility for fishery managers in “data poor” regions of the country for rebuilding depleted fisheries and setting annual catch levels;
- Seek to further improve the science and data on which Councils base their management;
- Increase transparency in science and management by allowing the public to play a greater role in the development of science and Fishery Management Plans;
- Gives stakeholders a voice in the management process and requires the Secretary of Commerce to develop a plan for implementing cooperative research with fishermen and outside groups;
- Includes a requirement for NOAA to provide better accountability on how fees are collected and used;
- Provides clarification on the role of the Magnuson-Stevens Act when interacting with other federal statutes like the Marine Sanctuaries Act and Antiquities Act; and
- Avoids creating the potential for litigation that could negatively impact what is widely considered to be an effective management system.

This legislation is similar to efforts I led during the 115th Congress, H.R. 200, which passed the House on July 11, 2018.

Looking Forward to Getting MSA Reauthorization Done

- In many ways, MSA continues to support Alaska and American fishermen and protects our fishery resource as envisioned.
 - However, our laws are not written in stone and we must constantly review them, listen to our constituents, and make changes when necessary.
- I look forward to once again hearing from the countless Alaskans and Americans who helped us develop these positive reforms.

- Just as we did in 2006 Congress must work in a bipartisan fashion to ensure this law keeps pace with changes in our industry and that it is being implemented as intended by Congress.

Closing

- I look forward to continuing to work with Rep. Huffman so we can reach a bipartisan agreement on the reauthorization of MSA.
- I yield back.

###