

Opening Statement

Good afternoon – Thank you for joining us to discuss five bills, all of which focus on marine conservation, protecting vulnerable marine animals and ecosystems, and increasing climate resiliency.

My bill, H.R. 6491, the Salmon Focused Investments in Sustainable Habitats Act, or Salmon FISH Act, promotes the vitality of salmon populations by identifying core areas of salmon abundance and pristine habitat and ensuring these areas receive the protection, support, and funding they need. In Northern California, salmon have a significant ecological, cultural, and economic role, yet their survival is in jeopardy due to habitat degradation, pollution, dams, and climate change. Protecting salmon populations is necessary for their future survival. Tribes have depended on salmon for centuries, commercial fishers rely on healthy fisheries for their livelihoods, and recreational anglers like myself love to spend their free time on the water casting for salmon.

The Salmon FISH Act directs NOAA and the Fish and Wildlife Service to collaborate with other federal agencies, tribes, states, and NGOs to identify areas of high-quality salmon habitat and protect these areas from destructive activities. Additionally, this bill creates a grant program that provides resources for restoring and conserving these areas and for watershed health.

As the adage goes, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. We cannot wait until the salmon habitat is irreparably damaged to invest in expensive restoration; we need to protect high-quality salmon habitat proactively.

Continuing the important topic of salmon, Representative Don Young's bill, H.R. 6651, the *Alaska Salmon Research Task Force Act*, establishes a task force to help identify strategies for conserving Alaskan salmon. Prioritizing scientific research needs and supporting collaboration for Pacific salmon conservation efforts in Alaska remains fundamental for protecting and sustaining their populations.

H.R. 6987, Representative Larsen's *Protecting Our Marine Mammals Act*, leverages advances in technology to monitor and protect marine mammals.

Marine mammals are a critical component of our ocean ecosystems, but without additional protections, some endangered mammals, like the iconic Southern Resident killer whale, will continue to be in harm's way. Only 74 Southern Resident killer whales remain. The need to protect these endangered creatures and ensure their longevity has brought bipartisan support for this legislation.

This bill capitalizes on cutting-edge technologies to reduce threats to whales, including underwater soundscape monitoring, near real-time tracking, mitigation measures to help ships avoid whales, and grants to promote research and development of noise-reducing technology.

On the theme of marine mammal conservation, Congressman Seth Moulton's bill, H.R. 6786, the *Right Whale Coexistence Act of 2022*, is commonsense legislation that should have been enacted years ago. Since 2010, North Atlantic Right Whale populations have declined due to emerging threats from ship strikes, fishing gear entanglement, and underwater noise.

You may recall Joe Cunningham's airhorn from our first hearing on this topic in 2019. At the time of the hearing, around 420 right whales were remaining. Sadly, that number has declined to fewer than 336 in less than three years.

This bill authorizes \$15 million annually to develop, test, and implement innovative technologies and strategies to reduce entanglements and vessel collisions. I thank Representative Moulton and members of our committee for taking the lead on developing these long-awaited North Atlantic right whale protections.

Finally, we will discuss Representative Chris Pappas' bipartisan bill, H.R. 3431, *Increasing Community Access to Resiliency Grants Act of 2021*. As climate impacts worsen, coastal communities need to mitigate the environmental and economic effects of rising sea levels and changing weather patterns. This bill increases accessibility for NOAA administered grant programs that assist states, tribes, Indigenous, and local communities with climate change planning, so that those who need financial support for climate mitigation know where to find it.

I am eager to hear from my colleagues about their legislation and look forward to the invaluable testimony of our invited witnesses.

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