

The Honorable Jared Huffman, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries
U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, D.C. 20515

March 7, 2023

Dear Ranking Member Huffman:

The undersigned recreational fishing businesses, organizations, and individuals write to you share our concerns about some of the challenges facing recreational fisheries today. Saltwater recreational fishing supports substantial economic activity in coastal communities and is an important tradition that brings together generations of Americans. In 2019, our industry of recreational businesses and anglers supported 553,000 jobs and over \$89 billion in sales impacts, in addition to providing livelihood, recreation, and connection to one another and to the ocean.¹

Saltwater recreational fishing relies on abundant fish populations that are managed sustainably by fishery managers in accordance with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA). However, in recent years, some have cited the challenges of managing recreational fisheries as reasons to weaken or roll back the conservation measures in the MSA that we depend on. This is especially troubling as, despite progress made under the MSA to rebuild stocks and support sustainable fishing, there is more work to be done to create resilience in our fisheries to ensure generations to come also have the opportunity to fish.

Healthy and abundant fish stocks are an important part of ocean ecosystems and provide opportunities for sustainable fishing now and in the future, and the MSA is a vital part of achieving them. The MSA has been transformative for U.S. fisheries and making them sustainable, but many challenges remain. Despite the progress made through the MSA, there are concerning signs that many stocks are struggling. For example, 20% of stocks are currently overfished. Frankly, we believe that managers could do more to ensure that the law is being implemented as intended to support the resilience of fish stocks and fishing communities.

To us, the greatest threats to the fisheries we rely on are rollbacks to the sustainability and accountability of recreational fishing, challenges with data collection, and our slow progress in addressing the impacts of climate change.

As Congress continues to explore ways to steward our ocean fisheries into the future, we look forward to working with you to address the following serious challenges to the sustainability of recreational fishing.

Sustainable Recreational Management and Data Collection

Just like any other fisheries sector, recreational fisheries have an impact on fish stocks and to grow fishing opportunities, we believe that management should be sustainable. That means it must be

¹ U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Fisheries Economics of the United States 2019, NOAA Technical Memorandum NMFS-F/SPO-229A (March 2022), at 14, available at https://media.fisheries.noaa.gov/2022-07/FEUS-2019-final-v3_0.pdf.

science-based, uphold catch limits and accountability measures, prevent overfishing, rebuild stocks, and conserve and restore habitat to support healthy and abundant fish stocks. In the long run, abundant fish stocks are what yields the greatest fishing opportunity, and changes to management shouldn't come at the expense of the fish.

Good management relies on good data, and we know that collecting recreational fishing data is inherently challenging. There are opportunities to improve upon our data system in ways that will make management more effective at supporting abundant fish stocks and allowing for the most fishing opportunities for anglers. NOAA Fisheries has made a number of improvements to recreational data over the years, and data collection should continue to build upon this foundation. This includes answering fundamental questions around the number of recreational anglers, their effort and catch, their mode of fishing, discards, and other questions. Improving data also means making refinements to existing recreational fishing surveys and integrating additional surveys in ways that ensure the quality of data is maintained and can adequately inform management, such as by calibrating new sources of data and maintaining consistency of supplemental data systems. New approaches should foster the development of innovative science-based solutions for recreational management. New data is useful *in addition to*, not in place of, existing information that provides a long-term view. We need to invest in obtaining more data and modernizing our data systems to ensure that our management is responsive and nimble to changes in biomass.

Addressing Climate Change Impacts

Climate change is making our ocean waters warmer, more acidic, and lower in oxygen and disrupting where fish are found, what they can eat, where they can live, and how many there are. As fishermen, we see these changes every day on the water. These impacts are affecting recreational fisheries and every part of the management system. There is a lot that fishery managers can do through MSA to prepare our fisheries to adapt to the impacts of climate change. However, the law does not explicitly address climate, and we see opportunities to incorporate climate into the law more fully. Action is needed now to help fisheries adapt to changing conditions. Delaying action to address the climate impacts on fisheries will have costs, such as lower catches, less stable management, and more fisheries disasters. The challenge of climate change shouldn't be a reason to throw up our hands and do less management and less accountability for recreational fisheries. Instead, fishermen, managers, and scientists need to work together better to make sure we are considering climate in management and making fish stocks as resilient as we can.

* * *

As recreational fishermen, businesses, and organizations, we deeply appreciate the decades of leadership in Congress that have created a sustainable fishery management system that supports substantial recreational fishing activity. We encourage you to look for ways to build on the successes we've seen, and avoid policy changes that might weaken the foundations of our system. Instead, we hope to work with you to tackle climate change impacts, enhance our data systems, and build resilience and abundance in our fisheries.

Thank you for considering our comments on these issues.

Sincerely,

Steve Stracqualursi,
Cofounder/Product Director
12wt

Whitney Tilt, Executive Director
AFTTA Fisheries Fund

Lucas Bissett, Executive Director
American Fly Fish Trade Association

Rick Crawford, President
Fly Fishing Climate Alliance
Emerger Strategies

Bake Merwin – Owner
Gig Harbor Fly Shop

Ross Purnell, Publisher/Editor
Fly Fisherman Magazine

Kirk Deeter, Publisher/Editor
Angling Trade Magazine

Michael DeJarnette, Publisher/Editor
Tail Magazine

Jack Reis, Director of Marketing
Fishpond

Chad Schmukler, Publisher/Editor
Hatch Magazine

Dave McCoy, Owner
Emerald Waters Anglers

Guy Fleischer, Science Advisor
Wild Steelhead Coalition

Brook Scott
Yellow Dog Community & Conservation
Foundation

Brian Bennett
Moldychum

Shane Cantrell
Galveston Sea Ventures

Todd Corayer
Fishwrapwriter.com

Tim Hardin
Venturing Angler

Rich Heffernan
Angler/Former Board Narragansett Surf Casters,
RI

Ned Bean
Plum Island and Martha's Vineyard
Surfcasters Association, MA

Eddie Doherty
Author

George Baldwin, President
Connecticut Surfcasters Association, CT

Patrick Cassidy
Owner Cape Cod on the Fly and New England
Maritime

Kyle Schaefer
Owner Soul Fly Lodge, Bahamas Flats
Soul Fly Outfitters, Maine

Peter Auster, PhD
Research Professor Emeritus, University of
Connecticut
Senior Research Scientist, Mystic Aquarium, CT

Abbie Schuster
Kismet Outfitters Tackle Shop/Charter Fishing
Guide,
Martha's Vineyard, MA

Bruce Bain
President, Narragansett Surfcasters, RI

David Monti
No Fluke Charters/RI Saltwater Anglers Assoc./
Am. Saltwater Guides Assoc./RI Marine
Fisheries Council

Jonathan Ungerland
President, Cape Cod Salties, MA

John Creighton
Trustee, Cape Cod Salties, MA

Chris Willi
Owner Block Island Fish Works
Outfitters/Charter Captain, RI

Chris Hunt
Hatch Adventure Travel

Ted Upton, CEO
Cheeky Fly Fishing

Peter Vandergrift, CMO
Wingo Outdoors