

**U.S. House of Representatives**  
**Committee on Natural Resources**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

July 2, 2024

Dr. Evan Howell  
Director of the Office of Science and Technology  
NOAA Fisheries  
1315 East-West Highway  
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Dr. Howell:

Thank you for appearing before the Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries legislative hearing on Thursday, June 27, 2024 to present testimony on H.R. 6841 (Rep. Levin), H.R. 7925 (Rep. D'Esposito), H.R. 8704 (Rep. Carter of GA) and H.R. 8705 (Rep. Graves of LA).

Your testimony was extremely helpful in defining the Subcommittee's understanding of the issues and I appreciate the effort you took to prepare and present your testimony. While many questions were asked during the hearing, the Subcommittee has additional questions, attached, for your reply.

Please forward your responses to Lindsay Walton, Clerk, Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries at [lindsay.walton@mail.house.gov](mailto:lindsay.walton@mail.house.gov) by July 17, 2024. Your assistance in meeting this deadline is requested, as failure to meet it will be noted in the printed transcript.

Once again, thank you for your extensive effort in making this a valuable hearing.

Sincerely,



Cliff Bentz  
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries  
Chairman

Enclosure

**Committee on Natural Resources**  
**Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries**  
**Legislative Hearing**  
**1324 Longworth House Office Building**  
**June 27, 2024**  
**9:30 AM**

- **H.R. 6841 (Rep. Levin)**, To amend the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972 to allow the Secretary of Commerce to establish a Coastal and Estuarine Resilience Program, and for other purposes;
- **H.R. 7925 (Rep. D’Esposito)**, *“Modernizing Access to Our Public Oceans Act”*;
- **H.R. 8704 (Rep. Carter of GA)**, To require the Secretary of Commerce to establish a grant program to foster enhanced coexistence between ocean users and North Atlantic right whales and other large cetacean species; and
- **H.R. 8705 (Rep. Graves of LA)**, *“Fisheries Data Modernization and Accuracy Act of 2024.”*

**Questions from Chairman Cliff Bentz for Dr. Evan Howell, Director, NOAA’s Office of Science and Technology**

1. Dr. Howell, during our hearing one of the criticisms that we heard of NOAA’s proposed amendments to the North Atlantic Right Whale Vessel Strike Reduction Rule was that NOAA failed to fully incorporate feedback from impacted industries. More specifically, stakeholders believe NOAA failed to consider technological solutions to reduce vessel strikes and other interactions with species like the North Atlantic right whale. During the hearing, you mentioned the technology workshop that NOAA held back in March. However, as has been noted on many occasions, the proposed rule was transmitted to the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) on the same day as the workshop.
  - a. How would NOAA have been able to incorporate any feedback or lessons learned at the workshop if the proposed rule was already submitted to OIRA before the workshop concluded?
2. When you were asked if there were technological devices that would allow for vessel operators to detect whales while on the water, you stated that NOAA was currently going through the technology review.
  - a. Wouldn’t it be more effective to conduct a thorough technology review prior to moving ahead with the proposed amendments?
3. Dr. Howell, on June 26th in an offshore wind briefing hosted by NOAA, Ms. Jenni Wallace, Director of NOAA Fisheries Office of Policy, went into detail describing the compensation program for businesses impacted by offshore wind lease sales.

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**Questions from Rep. Carl** for Dr. Evan Howell, Director, NOAA's Office of Science and Technology

**Dr. Howell**, during your tenure at NOAA, you have been actively engaged in efforts to reform the management of our recreational fisheries. **In what ways do you think NOAA can most effectively incorporate independent, third-party surveys and the work of state agencies to help manage our nation's fisheries?**

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**Questions from Rep. Jenniffer González-Colón** for Dr. Evan Howell, Director, NOAA's Office of Science and Technology

1. H.R. 8705 seeks to reform NOAA's Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP), which develops statistics on recreational fishing catch and effort. I've previously expressed concerns with the limited or lack of recreational fishing data for Puerto Rico included within the program. I understand the latest available recreational statistics for Puerto Rico are from 2016, given data collection efforts on the Island were suspended in late 2017 following Hurricane Maria.

In response to questions I submitted last year, NOAA indicated that the Caribbean MRIP Regional Implementation Team was working on developing alternative survey designs for both Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands that can generate reliable catch statistics. NOAA further indicated that it believed the team could complete this effort in 2023, and that once feasible and statistically sound designs were identified, it would work with regional partners to assemble the necessary resources and commence recreational effort and catch data collection in both territories.

Could you provide an update on the status of this initiative and discuss NOAA's efforts to support the resumption of recreational fishing data collection efforts in Puerto Rico?

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**Question from Rep. Levin for Dr. Evan Howell, Director, NOAA's Office of Science and Technology**

1. Dr. Howell, my district is constantly grappling with coastal issues, but we have seen firsthand how wetland and estuary habitats not only support vibrant and diverse ecosystems, but also provide economic benefits and help to protect against erosion. Can you speak to how the Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program (CELCP) and the National Estuarine Research Reserve System support the resilience and economies of coastal communities across the country?