

Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries Oversight Hearing
1324 Longworth House Office Building
June 4, 2025
10:15AM

“Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness.”

Questions from Chairman Bruce Westerman for Captain Rick Bellavance, Chair, Council Coordination Committee

1. Mr. Bellavance, the President’s Executive Order, “Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness,” directs the Secretary of Commerce to work with the Secretary of Agriculture to “develop and implement an America First Seafood Strategy to promote production, marketing, sale, and export of United States fishery and aquaculture products and strengthen domestic processing capacity.” In your opinion, how could the Saltonstall-Kennedy Program help advance this effort?

The Saltonstall-Kennedy (S-K) Program could be highly effective for advancing the objectives outlined in the President’s Executive Order, “Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness,” in several ways. By aligning its funding priorities with the goals of the Executive Order, the S-K Program can play a strategic role in advancing a comprehensive America First Seafood Strategy by bolstering domestic seafood production, processing, marketing, and exports while supporting innovation, sustainability, and economic opportunity in U.S. fishing communities.

Supporting Innovation and Technology in Domestic Seafood Processing

The S-K Program can prioritize funding for projects that directly align with the EO’s aim to strengthen domestic processing capacity:

- Enhance automation and efficiency in domestic seafood processing
- Develop value-added products from U.S. fisheries and aquaculture
- Promote sustainable practices that increase yield without degrading resources

Promoting U.S. Seafood Through Marketing and Consumer Education

By funding projects focused on stimulating demand and boosting the sale and export of American seafood:

- Domestic and international marketing campaigns that highlight the quality and sustainability of U.S. seafood
- Public awareness initiatives about the benefits of buying American seafood (e.g., nutrition, environmental sustainability, job creation)
- Branding and traceability technologies that build consumer trust in U.S. seafood

Supporting Aquaculture Development

The EO emphasizes expanding aquaculture as part of an “America First Seafood Strategy.” S-K funds can:

- Support research and pilot programs that reduce barriers to aquaculture expansion

- Fund development of cost-effective, environmentally responsible systems, including offshore and recirculating aquaculture
- Promote training and workforce development for aquaculture-related jobs

Enhancing Data and Infrastructure for Fisheries Management

Robust fisheries data and infrastructure support competitive and sustainable seafood production.

S-K grants can:

- Improve stock assessments, catch data, and traceability tools
- Invest in port infrastructure and facilities that support domestic landing, storage, and processing
- Support collaborative projects with fishermen and processors to inform science and policy

Building Resilience and Expanding Opportunities for Coastal Communities

S-K projects can also help smaller operations and communities by:

- Supporting local processing and distribution systems
- Providing grants for small-scale businesses to expand their operations or enter new markets
- Enhancing economic stability in fishing communities

2. *Additionally, in remarks submitted for the record, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) mentions 14 camera-based electronic monitoring programs across different fisheries. NOAA states that the adoption of new technologies can improve the management process while also reducing costs. How do you think the Regional Fishery Management Councils and the Council Coordination Committee can work on these issues going forward, particularly considering the Executive Order's mention of new technology?*

The Regional Fishery Management Councils (Councils) and the Council Coordination Committee (CCC) are in a strong position to help implement the Executive Order's call for the adoption of new technologies to improve fisheries management and reduce costs. By actively promoting and coordinating the adoption of electronic monitoring and other new technologies, the Councils and CCC can play a central role in realizing the Executive Order's vision of a modern, efficient, and competitive American seafood industry.

Integrate Electronic Monitoring (EM) into Fishery Management Plans

Councils can assist in aligning with the EO's emphasis on innovation and effective resource management:

- Incorporate EM requirements or options into existing and new Fishery Management Plans (FMPs), especially where traditional observer programs are costly or impractical
- Tailor EM systems (e.g., cameras, sensors, e-logbooks) to specific fishery needs, balancing regulatory compliance, data quality, and cost-efficiency

Standardize Best Practices Across Regions

The CCC can support standardization to increase adoption, reduce duplication of effort, and enhance regulatory efficiency:

- Facilitate the sharing of best practices, data protocols, and performance metrics across all Councils
- Encourage inter-council pilot projects to compare technology outcomes in different fisheries and regions

Foster Partnerships for Innovation

Councils and the CCC can promote the kind of research-to-operations activities the Executive Order envisions:

- Partner with NOAA, academic institutions, and industry to test and refine camera-based monitoring technologies
- Support public-private collaborations that help scale successful innovations and reduce costs over time

Guide Funding Opportunities

The Councils can provide guidance to funding sources to ensure that new technology adoption addresses real-world management challenges:

- Identify and advocate for funding, including through NOAA programs (like Saltonstall-Kennedy or Cooperative Research) or public-private investment
- Provide guidance to NOAA on funding priorities that align with council-identified technology needs

Engage Stakeholders to Build Support and Ensure Equity

New technology can raise concerns about cost, privacy, and impacts on small-scale fisheries; ensuring buy-in will be critical to widespread and sustained adoption. Councils should:

- Actively engage fishermen and stakeholders to gather feedback, explain benefits, and address concerns
- Consider scalable and flexible approaches that work for both small and large operations

Monitor Outcomes and Adapt

Councils and the CCC should promote a data-driven approach consistent with the Executive Order's goals:

- Track the performance of EM technologies in terms of cost savings, data accuracy, and compliance improvements
- Use an adaptive management framework to update FMPs and practices based on results