

**Written Testimony
NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF**

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**NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF COMMERCE FOR OCEANS AND ATMOSPHERE
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ON**

**H.R. 7332 (REP. MATSUI), “WHALE CHARTS ACT OF 2026”
H.R. 9621 (REP. BAUMGARTNER), “NORTHWEST ENDANGERED SALMON
PREDATION PREVENTION ACT OF 2026”
H.R. 8876 (REP. WALBERG), “AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES CONTROL AND
PREVENTION ACT OF 2026”**

**BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER, WILDLIFE, AND FISHERIES
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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Chairwoman Hageman, Ranking Member Hoyle, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on H.R. 7332 “Whale CHARTS Act of 2026,” H.R. 8876 “Aquatic Invasive Species Control and Prevention Act of 2026,” and H.R. 9621 “Northwest Endangered Salmon Predation Prevention Act of 2026.” My name is Dr. Timothy Petty, and I am the Assistant Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere and Deputy Administrator for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). NOAA acknowledges and appreciates our ongoing work with this Subcommittee.

H.R. 7322 - Whale CHARTS Act of 2026

NOAA is responsible for understanding our ocean and coasts and conserving and managing coastal and marine resources. NOAA’s Office of Coast Survey is responsible for maintaining the nautical charts and related publications for the United States and ensuring that they meet the standards of the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO). These charts and publications are essential to supporting safe navigation in U.S. waters, the flow of goods through U.S. ports, and the resiliency of coastal economies and environments. The federal government has responsibilities for marine mammal populations including whales, dolphins, and pinnipeds pursuant to the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) and for promoting the recovery of many fish, marine mammals, sea turtles, and other species listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

H.R. 7332 would amend the James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023 to provide for a mapping, surveying, monitoring, and mitigation program for migratory whales and other large cetaceans. The legislation directs the Under Secretary of Commerce to create distribution and predictive maps for migratory whale populations within U.S. waters, incorporating research on calving, mating, and feeding grounds, as well as migration routes, and conduct surveys for understudied whale populations. It amends the MMPA to require such distribution maps to be considered when preparing or reviewing stock assessments, and establishes a competitive grant program, managed by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, to fund research and technologies that reduce lethal and sub-lethal interactions between ocean users (such as the fishing and maritime industries) and whales.

NOAA continues to support efforts to better document the locations of whales and large cetaceans. Nevertheless, NOAA is currently unable to meet the specific requirements described in Section 2 of the Bill that direct NOAA to produce additional chart layers displaying the actual distribution and the predictive migration routes of whales. While some of the foundational data on whale migrations exist, more data is needed, and existing international and U.S. maritime standards limit NOAA's ability to meet these requirements at this time.

With regard to the international maritime standards, NOAA's charts must align with the standards developed by the IHO because ocean-going vessels navigate the marine environment using navigation systems that rely on the IHO's standards. Aligning NOAA's charts with the IHO's standards ensures the same charts are used by all ocean-going vessels – both U.S. and foreign-flagged vessels – as they pass through the different marine jurisdictions. Meanwhile, the IHO's standards for marine protected areas, under which the additional chart layers described in Section 2 of the Bill would best fit, will not be operational until approximately 2029. At that time, the International Maritime Organization plans to require new vessels over 500 gross tons (i.e., cruise or container ships or any vessel over 150 feet) to use the IHO's updated standards, which will display these additional marine protected area layers.

NOAA recommends that the committee consult with the U.S. Coast Guard, which is the agency responsible for the regulation of carriage requirements for U.S.-flagged vessels navigating in U.S. waters. Once the IHO updates are operational and navigation systems have gone through formal testing and implementation, the U.S. Coast Guard will need to require U.S.-flagged vessels to display these additional chart layers.

H.R. 8876 - Aquatic Invasive Species Control and Prevention Act of 2026

H.R. 8876 would amend the Nonindigenous Aquatic Nuisance Prevention and Control Act of 1990. The bill would increase the membership of the Task Force, codify the six regional panels that currently support the Task Force, and require enhanced coordination with the National Invasive Species Council. H.R. 8876 would also direct the Task Force to identify ecosystems susceptible to aquatic invasive species, update national and regional management control plans, develop a plan for federal agencies to conduct inspections and decontaminations of watercraft, and establish an inter-basin and intra-basin monitoring program, among other provisions.

As a co-chair of the Task Force, NOAA currently works with federal, state, tribal, territorial, and other partners to implement the Aquatic Nuisance Species Program, including monitoring, prevention, early detection, rapid response, and on-the-ground control of aquatic invasive species nationwide.

NOAA looks forward to working with the committee to ensure efficient use of taxpayer dollars.

H.R. 9621 - Northwest Endangered Salmon Predation Prevention Act of 2026

NOAA has responsibilities for marine mammal populations along the West Coast including whales, dolphins, and pinnipeds pursuant to the MMPA and for promoting the recovery of many fish, marine mammals, sea turtles, and other species listed as threatened or endangered under the ESA.

NOAA recognizes that pinniped predation is having a significant negative impact on the recovery of ESA-listed salmon and steelhead fishery stocks in certain areas of the Pacific Northwest and targeted lethal take of pinnipeds is at times warranted to promote the conservation and recovery of certain stocks of salmonids or other fish. The MMPA contains existing provisions for this purpose (MMPA section 120 generally and MMPA section 120(f) for the Columbia River Basin); however, as indicated in prior reports and testimonies to Congress, this process, as currently established in MMPA section 120 and 120(f), has not been particularly effective at achieving the overall goal of balancing requirements of the ESA and the MMPA. Since 1994, NOAA has issued 12 authorizations pursuant to sections 120 and 120(f) of the MMPA to intentionally take predatory sea lions, and while these permits have helped reduce predation on salmonids at a small scale and in certain areas, they have been ineffective at moving the needle for salmonid recovery overall. While the MMPA provides mechanisms beyond sections 120 and 120(f) — including a waiver of the Act's take moratorium under sections 101(a)(3) and 103, and the return of management authority to a state under section 109 — both require lengthy, formal rulemaking processes that can take decades and have never been successfully completed for this purpose. As a result, sections 120 and 120(f) remain the more workable authority for addressing pinniped predation on salmonids, though as currently structured this process has not been particularly effective at achieving the overall goal of balancing ESA and MMPA requirements at the scale needed for salmon recovery.

NOAA believes the provisions of the bill overall are implementable. It makes two main changes in order to reduce predation on ESA-listed salmonids and other fish that are species of concern. First, under revisions to Section 120(f) of the MMPA, the bill expands the areas where pinniped removals are authorized within the Columbia River and its tributaries. Second, under a new Section 120(k), the bill authorizes the Secretary to issue permits to the State of Washington and Covered Indian Tribes to lethally remove pinnipeds in other designated waters of the State.

Federal and state agencies, tribes, landowners, watershed councils, and private organizations have undertaken a large number of actions aimed at reducing the losses of ESA-listed salmonids from a number of sources. These combined actions represent an extraordinary and unprecedented cooperative effort in the Columbia River Basin to recover salmon and steelhead. ESA-guided recovery plans have been developed and implemented in every watershed, including actions to restore important habitat; improve dam passage survival; re-tool hatchery programs to assist

production in wild populations; and close, reduce or reshape fisheries to limit fishery-related mortality of ESA-listed salmon stocks and focus on selectively harvesting healthy stocks. These efforts equate to hundreds of millions of dollars invested annually and billions over the past decades.

NOAA is willing to provide more detailed technical assistance that we think could improve its implementation and effectiveness of this legislation.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this legislation. NOAA looks forward to working with the Subcommittee to support the Administration's priorities under Executive Orders 14192 "Unleashing Prosperity Through Deregulation" and 14276 "Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness" to rebuild fisheries and support the long-term sustainability of fishing communities. I welcome your questions on the bills before us today and look forward to a productive discussion.