My name is Jim Neva. I have 20 years of experience as Manager of different small ports in rural communities of S.W. Washington State. The economies of these rural communities is heavily dependent upon a healthy fishing industry. It is our history and it is who we are as a community. These were once thriving industries, providing robust economies that generation after generation of the local population accepted as a way of life. It is a hard life, but it was in their blood.

A "White Paper" produced by the Pacific County Economic Development Council last summer reported that, "The marine industries sector is an integral part of Pacific County's economic engine and community well-being. According to a recent Regional Industry Cluster Study completed for the Pacific Mountain Workforce Development Council, **marine industries account for more than 20% of the County's 5,885 jobs** and an estimated direct annual payroll in excess of $41.2 million. The tax revenue from these sales helps to fund County services and the operation of special districts, such as libraries, ports, water and emergency medical services."

Washington State's commercial fishing industry is structured around a multi-species fishery. Groundfish, halibut, albacore tuna, salmon and shellfish are all major species groups important to the industry. Important species within the groundfish category include whiting, flatfish, rockfish, lingcod and sablefish. In 2006, non-tribal commercial fish landings from Washington fisheries totaled nearly 109.4 million pounds, generating $65.1 million in ex-vessel value, which is the price received by commercial fishers for fish landed at the dock. Groundfish produced the greatest share of landings (about 54%). In terms of regional catch, the Coastal area is by far the largest contributor to commercial fish harvesting in Washington, accounting for 85 percent of total pounds landed and 63 percent of total ex-vessel value. Seafood processing also contributes significantly to the value of Washington's commercial fisheries. Including in-state processing, the wholesale value of fishery products caught in Washington waters was an estimated $101 million in 2006. Groundfish accounted for about 61 percent of this value.

The aggregate number of vessels landing at U.S. West Coast ports has decreased almost 67 percent since 1981. There was a large drop in the count of vessels delivering in the adverse oceanic conditions years of 1984 and the early 1990s. There were strategic buyout programs for vessels participating in the salmon fisheries in the 1990s and groundfish fishery in 2003. Vessel counts continued to drop until the late 1990s and have remained somewhat stable since then.

This bill will help alleviate some of the overwhelming burdens that have been placed upon the shore based groundfish fleet in the last few years. This is largely a question of fairness. Buy-back payments, observer costs, new vessel safety requirements and other government mandates have crippled the groundfish fleet, forcing a level of consolidation that has left Washington State with only five (5) non-whiting trawl boats.

The existence of these fleets is critical to the coastal communities that rely on the fishermen for their raw material and the jobs that shore-based processing create. The coastal communities of Washington need all the help we can get. Our ports and communities have been disproportionally impacted by these federal management programs, such as the buyback and the Trawl IFQ (Individual Fishing Quota) program. This program permanently removed 91 vessels and 239 fishing permits from the groundfish trawl fishery. We have reached a tipping point where, without some financial assistance from the government, further decline in the fleet will result in further erosion of the coastal fishing infrastructure and corresponding losses of shore-side jobs and facilities. **The REFI Pacific Act is critically important and its passage will have an immediate positive economic effect on our fishing businesses and our rural Washington coastal communities, who rely on these fishermen.**