Key message: The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), which was most recently amended in 2006, is working and should be fully funded so that we can continue to rebuild our depleted fisheries.

- The National Marine Fisheries Service’s (NMFS) budget must be fully funded. Cutting NMFS resources will undermine recent gains in ending overfishing and place the jobs and revenue that are dependent upon healthy ocean fish populations at risk.

- Overfishing is being reduced. After years of overfishing that depleted one of our nation’s greatest resources, the MSA is finally bringing overfishing under control.

- Undermining the conservation and rebuilding provisions of the MSA will be more costly for fish and fishermen. Studies repeatedly show that fishermen and related industries would generate far more revenue if fish populations were rebuilt to sustainable levels as opposed to allowing overfishing to continue.

- The new sector management system is working for fish and fishermen. In the New England groundfish fishery, which has been subject to overfishing for literally decades, a new management system known as sectors implemented under the MSA is giving fishermen more control over how they fish and putting the power of the marketplace into their hands. Prices are up and most fishermen have made more money while catching fewer fish this year than last.¹

Background:
- In 2006, Congress amended the MSA, our federal fisheries law, with broad bi-partisan support to require an end to overfishing through the use of science-based catch limits.

- A recent report by NMFS found that the commercial fishing industry generated $104 billion in sales and $45 billion in income, and supported about 1.5 million jobs in 2008. It also found that recreational fishing contributed $59 billion in sales to the U.S. economy and supported over 384,000 jobs”.² This economic contribution is only possible with healthy fish populations.

Further detail on key messages: The MSA is working and should be fully funded so that we can continue to rebuild our depleted fisheries.

- The National Marine Fisheries Service’s (NMFS) budget must be fully funded. Cutting NMFS resources will undermine recent gains in ending overfishing and places jobs that are dependent upon healthy ocean fish populations at risk.

  - The 2011 budget passed by the House of Representatives (H.R. 1), proposes a roughly 22% cut to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) compared to the President’s request. NOAA’s National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is charged with managing our ocean’s fisheries, which provide fresh seafood for millions of Americans. A cut of this magnitude would be catastrophic - impeding NOAA’s ability to implement essential services, such as forecasting weather, managing commercial fisheries, protecting endangered species, and keeping our ocean waters clean and safe.

  - NMFS is currently working to eliminate overfishing and put all fisheries on a sustainable track, but their job is dependent upon having the resources to collect accurate and timely data about the

health of fish stocks, and enough managers to oversee management programs. Any cuts to their budget will undermine data collection that sets the allowable catch limits and cause unnecessary hardships for fishermen and the industry.

• **Overfishing is being reduced.**
  - After years of overfishing that degraded one of our nation’s greatest assets, we are finally bringing overfishing under control. We can’t afford the unsustainable practices of the past.
  - The MSA of 2006 mandated an end to overfishing and that is finally happening. According to federal fisheries chief Eric Schwaab, U.S. fisheries are on track to meet the goal of ending overfishing this year, and prospects for the fishing industry should improve in years to come.
  - Conservation measures are working. For example, stocks of New England Scallops, Mid-Atlantic Bluefish and Pacific Lingcod have all been rebuilt and other species, such as Gulf Red Snapper and Mid-Atlantic Summer Flounder are recovering. In New England, with less than a month to go in the season, none of this years catch limits are close to being exceeded.

• **Undermining the conservation and rebuilding provisions of the MSA will be more costly for fish and fishermen.** We cannot afford to turn back the clock to the shortsighted and unsustainable fishery management practices of the past.
  - Some members of Congress believe that despite the progress being made, the conservation provisions that are creating more sustainable fisheries, should be rolled back. Congress should support the bi-partisan MSA rather than micro-manage through legislation that would set back the recovery of our nation’s fish stocks. Congress must reject calls to weaken the law by disregarding science-based quotas and rebuilding timeframes.
  - According to NMFS, rebuilding the nation’s fisheries would generate an additional $31 billion in sales and support an additional 500,000 jobs. A 2005 study by the University of British Columbia: Fisheries Economics Research Unit showed that rebuilding fish stocks would generate 3 times more profit for fishermen than continuing to catch fish at unsustainable levels.
  - Flexibility legislation would create loopholes in the MSA by extending deadlines for rebuilding depleted fish populations. Opponents claim that flexibility is needed, but MSA already allows adequate flexibility in the rebuilding timeframes, and such timeframes are not “arbitrary”.

• **The new sector management system is working for fish and fishermen.** In New England the new management system gives fishermen more control over how they fish and thus puts the power of the marketplace into their hands.
  - Prices are up and most fishermen have made more money by catching fewer fish this year than last. The most recent NMFS data show that in New England the management approach of “sectors” is a growing success: overall revenues are up by 8% compared to the same period last year in the groundfish fishery while landings are down 12%.
  - Senator Olympia Snowe endorsed the new system when she pointed out that the previous “Days-at-Sea system devastated opportunities for our fishermen to work and drained a number of key fish species out of the Gulf of Maine’s world-class habitat. The new system gives fishermen more tools to better manage their stocks… As a result, the catch of healthy stocks, including haddock and redfish, are up by more than 10 percent. Moreover, the rate of discarded fish has fallen from historically high levels of 15 percent to roughly 2.5 percent.”

---


6 Portland Press Herald, March 25, 2011, Maine Voices: Empowering fishermen to manage groundfishery is working