

August 5, 2014

Congressman John Tierney  
6<sup>th</sup> District of Massachusetts  
U.S. House of Representatives

Congressman Peter DeFazio  
Ranking Member, Natural Resources Committee  
U.S. House of Representatives

Dear Congressmen:

Members of the Fish Locally Collaborative (FLC) and our broader community of supporters appreciate the opportunity to provide preliminary comments to you both concerning reauthorization of the Magnuson-Steven Act (MSA). The FLC is a network of fishing communities, including fishers, processors, marketers, families, and seafood consumers, with over 400 individuals representing sixty organizations and networks, and over 400,000 fishing families spanning the globe.

The FLC began in 2008 with a focus on the New England fishing industry and has in-depth experience with the difficulties and problems that have resulted from the 2007 reauthorization of MSA and the subsequent implementation of Catch Shares.

The FLC does not speak as a unified voice on all matters, but rather seeks to collaborate, research, and learn from each other in developing new solutions and policy directives in sustainable fisheries. This particular letter is signed by fishermen and organizations that have quickly discussed this particular opportunity to speak to you both today. We hope to continue conversations with you and others in Congress and NOAA, and to refine our recommendations for specific reform language in the MSA over coming months.

#### FLC Perspectives on MSA and the Status of the Fisheries

The FLC is committed to restoration of marine ecosystems, fishing communities, and a fair seafood value chain. A genuine democratic and bottom-up approach to fisheries management is needed to achieve healthier ecosystems and ensure a diverse fleet that maximizes value to fishing communities, local economies, and the food system. Success will be achieved when appropriate management tools are made available, fishermen's local knowledge is accounted for in the decision-making process, and the scale of fishing matches the scales of the ecosystems.

The fishing industry includes ports, fleets, processors, and people who eat seafood. Our nation benefits from strong coastal communities (both rural and urban) and measuring a fisherman's impact needs to include the triple bottom line with an increased focus on community (social) values and benefits. Corporate interest and

control over access to fisheries hurts marine ecosystems, hurts local economies, hurts the seafood value chain, and divides fishing communities.

The MSA establishes goals and describes national benefits in terms of fish stocks, habitat protection, port economies, and seafood, but current management has focused primarily on fishing and its impact on habitat, to the relative exclusion of community benefits and healthy seafood.

While cutbacks in allowable catch driven by ten-year rebuilding plans have received the greatest attention as the cause of economic distress in the fishing fleets and ports, the current management system has exacerbated these difficulties greatly, particularly for community-based and family-owned boat fishermen, through such mechanisms as:

- Insufficient and lagging stock assessments
- Non-transparent quota lease markets
- Collapsing prices
- Inflexibility in shifting effort to other fish
- Expensive monitoring costs
- Regulations that fail to protect the discrete, local fish populations that are so important to community-based and family-owned boat fishermen.

MSA reauthorization provides the opening to address this crisis, but more work needs to be done to understand what has happened and how to fix it.

#### Four Priorities for MSA Reauthorization

FLC signatories to this letter would like to put forward for your consideration today four important issues to be addressed in the reauthorization:

##### 1. SAFEGUARDS TO ENSURE FLEET DIVERSITY AND NATIONAL BENEFITS

Various fisheries management approaches, including Catch Share management, are consolidating fisheries access into fewer and larger-scale businesses to the exclusion of owner-operator, younger generation, and independent fishermen. This consolidation creates a disproportionate loss of fisheries access to rural communities, loss of infrastructure, negative ecological impacts, and loss of food access.

Baseline safeguards must be established to ensure that opportunity is provided for a more diverse fleet, that access remain affordable, that owner-operators be incentivized, that scale of fishing matches the scales of the ecosystems, and that access be tied to regional goals and vision.

##### 2. NON-FISHING IMPACTS

Current fisheries management is obligated to manage healthy fish stocks and yet

they are not required to address non-fishing impacts such as climate change, pollution, deforestation, mining, and oil and gas exploration, which all have enormous effects on fish population. The result is a lack of full understanding of what impacts fish populations and therefore a mis-management of harvesting efforts.

The narrow approach and micro-focus on controlling fishing pressure in order to maintain healthier fish populations places a disproportionate level of blame and responsibility on fishing businesses and deflects responsibility from large-scale polluters, in particular.

### 3. FISH IS FOOD

Current fisheries management ignores the goal of catching fish to feed people. The absence of this goal and purpose keeps managers in the dark when it comes to evaluating how well we are actually feeding people. The neglect contributes to our lack in understanding for where seafood goes, whom it benefits, and whom it excludes.

National Standard 1, in particular, should be re-examined to make improvements in achieving the MSA goal of 'greatest benefit to the nation', including provision to include healthy, local seafood.

### 4. TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The current Regional Council process for drafting of fisheries management plans is not well-suited to address the needs of independent and owner-operator fishermen, nor to consider and incorporate the perspectives of fishing communities and consumers of local seafood.

Management programs such as Catch Shares are further concentrating fisheries access into fewer hands, and coupled with global investment strategies to acquire fisheries access, it is critical that we increase levels of transparency so that fisheries managers and the public understand who is controlling fisheries access.

In addition, the same policies are leading to more and more data and information to be labeled as "proprietary information" keeping the public in the dark about what's really happening to the ocean commons.

The Council process must be reformed to better represent the wide range of concerns of fishing communities and of the national interest, and more information needs to remain in the public domain.

We look forward to continued discussions about MSA Reauthorization and thank you for convening this public meeting in Gloucester today.

Sincerely,

**Commercial Fishermen**

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