



COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES DEMOCRATS

Ranking Member Nick J. Rahall, II

Fisheries Science and Management Enhancement Act of 2005 (FSMEA) March 2005

As Americans consumed a record 4.7 billion pounds of seafood in 2003 and sports fishing pumped over \$116 billion into local economies across the country in 2001, the fish available to consumers and commercial and recreational fishermen in U.S. waters is dwindling.

For almost three decades, reports have highlighted the need for science to guide the management of our nation's fisheries for the benefit of all Americans. Yet the current system of fisheries management allows management councils to ignore scientific information when determining fish harvest. As a result, we have seen a decline in fish populations leading to an economic burden on consumers, small fishermen, and fishing communities.

The recently released final report of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy (USCOP) concluded that, "Our failure to properly manage the human activities that affect the nation's oceans, coasts, and Great Lakes is compromising their ecological integrity, diminishing our ability to fully realize their potential, costing us jobs and revenue, threatening human health, and putting our future at risk."

Among the recommendations of the Commission were a series of actions to better integrate science into fishery management decisions. The Fisheries Science and Management Enhancement Act of 2005 seeks to implement these recommendations.

- ✓ **How to Better Integrate Science In To Fisheries Management Decisions**

Currently, fisheries management decisions are made by regional fishery management councils comprised of individuals with a vested economic interest in the fishery. Too often, short-term economic considerations outweigh the long-term resource sustainability in management decisions. To address this issue, the Commission recommended changes to current law that separate decisions regarding how many fish to catch from those who catch the fish.

Specifically, FSMEA creates Science and Statistical Committees composed of qualified Federal, State, academic, or independent scientists to determine catch levels. The management councils then decide how to allocate the catch among various user groups.

✓ **Improving the Decision-Making Process by Increasing Representation and Enhancing Transparency**

Currently, eighty to ninety percent of appointed fishery council members represent fishing interests. FSMEA implements the recommendations of the USCOP by requiring balanced representation on the councils. The legislation also develops stricter financial disclosure requirements and voting guidelines to ensure that council decisions are not driven by one member's financial interests.

✓ **Enhancing Scientific Understanding**

One of the greatest challenges facing fisheries managers is the lack of organized information about the health of the nation's fish populations and the effects of fishing on ecosystems. Decisions are based on complex information complicated by multiple legal and regulatory requirements.

To ensure that decisions are made with the best information, FSMEA establishes a new cooperative research and data collection program. In addition, the bill provides for training of new council members in fisheries science, basic ecology, social science, and fisheries economics. FSMEA funds this research and training through an existing program that collects tariffs on imported fish.