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Community Leaders Call for Science and Accountability in Fisheries Management

Senate Hearing Testimony Emphasized Needs of Coastal Communities

Soldotna, AK – Local leaders representing Alaskan fishermen, conservation and coastal communities today called for greater accountability and conservation measures in the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), the primary U.S. federal fisheries law. Linda Behnken, president of the [Halibut Coalition](#) and executive director of the [Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association](#), and Shannon Carroll, deputy director of the [Alaska Marine Conservation Council](#), will testify today at the field hearing for the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee that the current law has been successful in managing fisheries resources that support local businesses and working waterfronts.

“Both fishermen and managers understand that in the long run no one wins if the resource loses,” said Behnken. “As Congress works to strengthen the Magnuson-Stevens Act to support community-based fishermen, we firmly believe that maintaining productive fisheries through resource conservation is step one in that process.”

Behnken and Carroll addressed those sectors that have been challenging the science-based catch limits and strong accountability measures in the MSA to achieve short-term economic gain for their businesses. The [“Modernizing Recreational Fisheries Management Act of 2017” \(S. 1520\)](#) introduced last month by Senator Roger Wicker (R-MS) includes language for “flexibility” with catch limits and other management measures in the recreational fishing sector, which could potentially lead to chronic overfishing.

“Although recreational fishing and commercial fishing are different activities with different objectives, the end result of both sectors is the same: the harvesting of a public resource,” said Carroll. “I would urge this Committee to ensure that sound science and individual accountability are the foundation of any new proposal for best management practices for recreational fishing.”

“Rebuilding fish populations benefits not only fish and fishermen, but also those who are part of the larger seafood economy, including the chefs, restaurants, retailers, and other seafood businesses that rely on a steady supply of seafood,” Behnken explained. “As U.S. consumers increasingly demand sustainably managed and caught seafood, the conservation requirements of the MSA are a win for both business owners and their customers.”

In written testimony, Behnken and Carroll emphasized the importance of adequate funding for more frequent stock assessments, data, research and accountability measures, which are called for under the law's existing framework.

“For over forty years, Alaska has demonstrated that science-based annual catch limits, robust stock assessments and fisheries data, effective accountability measures, and a transparent public review process are the cornerstone of effective fisheries management,” stated Carroll.

Behnken and Carroll also called for greater access to fisheries for community-based fishermen who serve as the foundations for working waterfronts and coastal communities in Alaska and around the country.

“The next generation faces daunting challenges, including high cost of entry, financial risks, and limited entry-level opportunities,” said Carroll. “With the loss of local access to fisheries comes the loss of local opportunity.”

“Strong, resilient and profitable fisheries and fishing communities must be a goal of this reauthorization,” concluded Behnken.

The Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries, & Coast Guard will hold its field hearing on Wednesday, August 23, 2017 at 1 p.m. AKDT at Kenai Peninsula College. More information about the “Reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act: Oversight of Fisheries Management Success and Challenges” hearing can be found on the [Senate Subcommittee web site](#).

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The Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association is an alliance of small boat, commercial fishermen committed to sustainable fisheries and thriving coastal communities. Our members support science-based fisheries management through collaborative research, advocacy and innovation. We work to safeguard ocean health and improve the economic viability of small boat fishing. Learn more at alfafish.org

Founded in 1994, Alaska Marine Conservation Council is a community-based, nonprofit organization committed to protecting the long-term health of Alaska's marine ecosystems and sustaining the working waterfronts of our state's coastal communities. Our members include fishermen, subsistence harvesters, marine scientists, business owners, conservationists, families, and others who care deeply about Alaska's oceans.