

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-2106
March 11, 2013

The Honorable Doc Hastings
Chairman
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Hastings:

I understand the Natural Resources Committee will soon convene its first in a series of hearings on the reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Public Law 94-265). This is welcomed news, as fishermen in my district and throughout the country are facing near catastrophic circumstances under the existing regulatory structure. Comprehensive and thoughtful reform is long overdue, so I appreciate your attentiveness to such a critical issue and your willingness to begin what I expect will be a bipartisan reauthorization process.

I certainly agree with those who believe that we must increase flexibility and stability for fishermen, while maintaining healthy fish stocks. It is also imperative to ensure that any limitations placed on allowable catch be based on peer-reviewed stock assessments undertaken in the preceding year. A greater emphasis must be placed on the impact of fishery management plans on recreational and commercial fishermen and coastal businesses, and the Secretary of Commerce must be required to put forth plans to mitigate such effects. Finally, further flexibility must be given to rebuilding timelines in order to appropriately take into consideration effects on stocks other than commercial and recreational fishermen, such as environmental changes and their impact on marine ecosystems.

As the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) acknowledged in the past year, the lack of progress in rebuilding a number of groundfish stocks critical to the economic survival of the fishing industry in New England cannot be blamed on the actions of fishermen. It is clear that continued cuts to catch limits have not mitigated this repeated failure. I trust that you and your Committee Members will be informed and guided by the testimony, evidence, and analysis presented at the series of hearings and fully consider whether simply amending the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act is sufficient to meet the diverse challenges confronting the fishing industry or if an entire new legislative and regulatory framework is warranted.

Additionally, as you are likely aware, in the last seven months, federal fisheries disasters have been declared in 9 states, including Alaska, Mississippi, and Massachusetts. With drastic cuts to catch limits looming, and with fishermen and their families already struggling to make ends meet, economic assistance is desperately needed. I have filed bipartisan legislation – entitled the Fisheries Disaster Relief and Research Investment Act – that would provide fishermen and their communities with the financial assistance they need without increasing discretionary spending. My bill would also ensure that duties collected from imported fish products support efforts to improve science and ultimately rebuild and sustain healthy fish populations. I respectfully request that the Committee either include the Fisheries Disaster Relief and Research Investment Act as part of any comprehensive legislation to reform the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act or advance it as a stand-alone measure. I look forward to speaking with you further about this at your earliest convenience.

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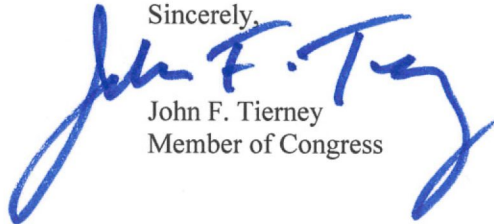
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Finally, I believe it is important for you and your Committee Members to hear directly from fishermen about the impact the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and its implementation has had on their lives and businesses. As we have previously discussed, I have the privilege of representing Gloucester, Massachusetts – the nation's oldest fishing port. I understand John Pappalardo of the Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fishermen's Association will be testifying at this week's hearing. However, as you and your staff plan for future hearings, I would encourage you to consider inviting fishermen and other relevant stakeholders from Gloucester.

Thank you for your attention and consideration. I look forward to continuing our work together to help our fishermen and ensure they are treated with fairness.

Sincerely,



John F. Tierney
Member of Congress

CC: The Honorable Edward J. Markey
Ranking Member
Committee on Natural Resources