

Senators Weigh in on Billfish Conservation Act

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WASHINGTON, DC February 17, 2017 – Conservationists and anglers are praising a bill filed Wednesday by U.S. Senators Bill Nelson (D-Fla.), Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.) and Jerry Moran (R-Kan.) that seeks to clear the way for full implementation of a landmark law to raise protections for billfish. The Billfish Conservation Act (BCA) was lauded when it was signed into law in 2012, but a slight ambiguity in the wording of the original legislation prevented it from being implemented as intended by the federal government.

“IGFA has been devoted to the success of the Billfish Conservation Act from the beginning, and we are hopeful that the action of Senators Nelson, Rubio, Manchin and Moran will close the continental U.S market for billfish once and for all,” said Rob Kramer, president of the International Game Fish Association. “On behalf of the millions of saltwater recreational anglers, thank you for working to ensure the United States is the leader in billfish conservation.”

The Billfish Conservation Act banned the importation of all billfish caught by foreign fleets into the continental United States and, perhaps most importantly, set an example for other countries to pursue similar conservation efforts once thought impossible. However, questions arose over whether the same prohibitions on foreign caught billfish imposed by the bill also applied to billfish caught commercially in Hawaii. If commercially caught billfish could be transported from Hawaii to the U.S. mainland, it would circumvent the intent of the conservation measure. The legislation introduced today simply clarifies that billfish landed in Hawaii must be retained there.

“CCA always supported a complete prohibition on the sale of billfish to U.S. markets, and we are grateful to Senators Nelson, Rubio, Manchin and Moran for clarifying that prohibition,” said Patrick Murray, president of Coastal Conservation Association. “Closing off this market and removing the bounty on these majestic fish for foreign fleets is a big victory for conservation.”

Prior to the passage of the Billfish Conservation Act, the U.S. was the number one importer of billfish in the world. U.S. calls for greater billfish conservation in international fishery management circles in the past were often met with skepticism, and disregarded. Implemented as originally intended, the law should make it easier for the U.S. to establish a greater leadership role for the international protection of billfish.

“On behalf of America’s 11 million saltwater anglers, a big ‘thank you’ to Senators Nelson, Rubio, Manchin and Moran for filing this fix to the Billfish Conservation Act,” said Jeff Angers, president of the Center for Sportfishing Policy. “This effort will have a measurable impact on the conservation of these incredible fish and strengthen America’s commitment to sound fisheries management.”

The coalition of groups supporting the Billfish Conservation Act includes American Sportfishing Association, Center for Sportfishing Policy, Coastal Conservation Association, Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, the Guy Harvey Ocean Foundation, the National Marine Manufacturers Association, OCEARCH and Wild Oceans.

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The American Sportfishing Association (ASA) is the sportfishing industry's trade association committed to representing the interests of the sportfishing and boating industries as well as the entire sportfishing community. We give the industry and anglers a unified voice when emerging laws and policies could significantly affect sportfishing business or sportfishing itself. ASA invests in long-term ventures to ensure the industry will remain strong and prosperous, as well as safeguard and promote the enduring economic, conservation and social values of sportfishing in America. ASA also gives America's 46 million anglers a voice in policy decisions that affect their ability to sustainably fish on our nation's waterways through Keep America Fishing[®], our national angler advocacy campaign. America's anglers generate more than \$48 billion in retail sales with a \$115 billion impact on the nation's economy creating employment for more than 828,000 people.

ASA, Billfish Act, Billfish Conservation Act, CCA, CSF, Guy Harvey Ocean Foundation, NMMA, OCEARCH