

**Testimony of Michael K. Goto
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**Listening session on the Reauthorization of the
Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act
February 21, 2020
Bishop Museum Atherton Halau**

Aloha Rep. Huffman, Rep. Case, and everyone in attendance.

My name is Michael Goto and I have been involved with the Hawaii seafood & longline fishing industry for the past 13 years. I am an executive of United Fishing Agency and the manager of the Honolulu fish auction, which is the nation's only daily tuna auction. Our company is the first receiver of most of the domestic longline catch that is landed into Hawaii and we consolidate the marketers and vendors together so they may purchase and distribute this product safely to the public. In addition to the longline landings, we also service the troll and bottomfish fisheries as well. For over 60 years, United Fishing has been the cornerstone that has made Hawaii famous for our prized seafood.

However, my involvement with the fishery reaches into many other components of the regulatory system:

I am a Council Member of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council on which I have served the past 7 ½ years.

I am also a United States Commissioner to the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, the international convention that monitors and manages highly migratory species in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean. I have served on the Commission since 2014 and received this appointment directly from President Obama.

It goes without saying that I am involved with these critical organizations due to the importance they have on the Hawaii longline fishery, but that importance traces directly to the utilization of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. Under the MSA, the Hawaii longline fleet has evolved into the premier fishery in the world while providing some of the highest valued and sustainable seafood available.

Management of the fishery through the MSA framework first began in the early 1990s. These measures include spatially separating the fleet from small vessels, satellite-based vessel tracking systems, a limited entry permit program, logbook reporting, onboard observers, and gear requirements.

Although a heavily regulated fishery, the Hawaii longline vessels are the largest food producing industry in the State of Hawaii. Six days a week at Pier 38, tuna and other pelagic species are auctioned to the highest bidder. Typically, there are 20 or so buyers bidding on each

individual fish, whereby the buyers are purchasing for wholesale distribution companies, retail markets, or home consumption. The advantage of our auction system is that anyone from the public can come into the auction and bid on a fish.

Given the multitude of species and range of quality of fish landed from each longline vessel, the auction system caters to the seafood industry providing them the flexibility to focus their business models on niche markets which results in all fish being sold and fishermen being paid on that day. The auction's ability to market a wide variety of fish also helps reduce bycatch and achieve MSA's goal for sustainability. Every fish that is sold through the auction can also be tracked back to the vessel, contributing to traceability of our seafood. We are confident when we say "every pound can be found," which I know for a fact can't be said for foreign vessels supplying our same market.

I know firsthand that the Hawaii longline fishery is feeding Hawaii residents and visitors alike. Food security is a major issue for island communities and I'm proud to be involved in the Hawaii seafood industry which is so important to the islands. It is because of the MSA management framework that the Hawaii longline fishery has been able to grow and provide substantial benefits to the islands. Growth in the Hawaii longline fishery has been made possible due to high levels of monitoring and the stringent environmental review requirements. Without the MSA framework, we may not be where we're today because of too much uncertainty.

The MSA framework and process can often be slow and tedious, but it is undoubtedly an effective fishery management system based on public participation and regional perspectives. Blanket national policies and regulations don't often complement the US Pacific Islands. The MSA promotes a regional approach to fisheries management as long as the measures developed are consistent with 10 National Standards and other applicable law.

Noticeably, there's been a recent trend of poke shops opening on the mainland. A substantial contributor to this trend is the reputation of Hawaii fish as high quality, healthy, and sustainable. Because of the effective management framework, demand for Hawaii fish is high and increasing due to increasing popularity of poke and sashimi in the US. Increasing demand is a good thing but also requires adaptability. The MSA framework does support adaptive management, but must be based on the best available science, which is formed by the fisheries monitoring system. Because of the MSA framework and measures applied to fishery over the past 30 years, we are confident that this fishery has been managed for long-term sustainability and continuity.

Non-MSA actions that negatively impact our fishing industry are often more concerning. These include the Marine National Monument designations that closed vast areas of fishing grounds, the 2018 Amendments to the Billfish Prohibition Act, and emerging international convention on protecting biological diversity beyond national jurisdiction.

All the Nation's industries are vulnerable and ours is no different. The United States seafood market, which around 90% is derived from foreign imports, is among the world's largest. Poorly monitored, less regulated foreign fisheries have equal access to US markets as do domestic vessels. However, I do believe that because of the MSA, US landed seafood can be

differentiated from foreign sources, which should deserve market recognition. Hawaii seafood is globally recognized for its high quality and comprehensive management regime, built largely using the MSA framework.

We are proud of our fishery and benefits it brings to Hawaii and hope to continue providing this valued product into the foreseeable future.

Thank you Rep. Huffman and Rep. Case for your time.