

Magnuson-Stevens Act Talking Points – Mike Tosatto

Rep. Case Listening Tour

Friday, February 21, 2020

Bishop Museum, Honolulu, HI

Greetings to Representative Case, Chairman Huffman and my fellow panelists. I would like to express my appreciation to Representative Case for inviting me to participate on this panel and provide the Federal fisheries management perspective.

Here in the Pacific Islands, the National Marine Fisheries Service works to ensure sustainable fisheries and protect marine resources throughout the region – which stretches from Hawaii in the north, to American Samoa, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. I serve as the Regional Administrator, leading the professional staff of the Pacific Islands Regional Office, known to many as PIRO. Along with our colleagues at the NMFS's Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center who provide the cutting-edge science necessary to help inform management decisions in this changing environment, PIRO works to conserve and manage marine resources in this vast geographical region. We accomplish our work through many valuable partnerships, several of which are represented in this session today.

I am pleased to say that the nation's current fisheries management regime, anchored by the Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act and its regional fishery management council system, has been very successful in maintaining healthy fisheries in the Pacific Islands Region. Nationwide, under this framework, over 90 percent of U.S. stocks are not subject to overfishing and over 80 percent are not overfished. 47 stocks have been rebuilt since the year 2000. Some of those successes have and are occurring here in the Pacific Islands Region, as the successes in management in turn led to approximately \$1 billion in total sales generated by the fishing industry and supported 11,000 jobs in 2016 for Hawaii alone. In partnership with the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council, we enjoy some of the healthiest and most productive fish stocks in the Nation, which in turn helps advance the seafood competitiveness of the United States and strengthens the value of fisheries to the U.S. economy.

Those successes are not without their challenges and complexities for management. As you all know, we share many highly migratory fish stocks with foreign fleets across the Pacific. NMFS has worked in international fora, such as the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, to ensure sustainable management of bigeye tuna across the Pacific while also advocating for U.S. fishermen's access to high-seas fisheries. NMFS is also leading the effort to rebuild the Pacific bluefin tuna stock, which is overfished and subject to overfishing primarily due to effort by foreign fleets. These efforts will help ensure the sustainability of tuna and food security for seafood consumers, and advances the competitiveness of the fishing industry, both here in the Pacific Islands and in the United States overall.

NMFS also works with the State and territory governments on sustainable management of our shared fishery resources. An example of this close partnership, NMFS and the State of Hawaii have established a coordinated management regime that has ended overfishing and ensured

sustainable harvest of the culturally and economically important deep-water bottomfish here. NMFS looks forward to similar successes in ensuring sustainable management of bottomfish resources in Guam, CNMI, and American Samoa by partnering with Territorial governments.

As we look to the future, NMFS consistently seeks opportunities to further improve our management system. For example, a large part of sustainably managing our nation's fisheries is collecting fisheries-dependent data from fishermen. Traditionally, we've relied on a combination of paper logbooks from fishermen, catch data from independent observers, and landings data from shoreside dealers. However, electronic monitoring is an important technological advancement that supplements the work fishery observers and at-sea monitors do, while keeping them as safe as possible. As an agency, NMFS has been working across the country with its partners to consider and incorporate such technologies as appropriate into our fishery management. Here in the Pacific Islands, NMFS has been working with groups like the Hawaii Longline Association to pilot electronic monitoring in the longline fishery, and we are getting some critical information about the potential management benefits from our colleagues at PIFSC. We look forward to continued efforts in electronic monitoring with the Council, industry, and other stakeholders to see what we can do to capitalize upon these valuable technologies.

Some challenges remain. For example, annual catch limits (ACLs) are an effective tool in ending overfishing and rebuilding fish stocks. However, implementing them and associated accountability measures has been challenging in some fisheries—particularly where it is difficult to obtain comprehensive data on stock status and fishing harvests. For example, setting effective ACLs for bottomfish species in the Pacific Island territories is one of our biggest challenges due to the difficulty in collecting enough reliable fisheries-related data.

In conclusion, I reiterate my thanks for the opportunity to contribute to this panel and I look forward to the forthcoming discussion.