

Recreational Fishing Alliance

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Contact: Jim Hutchinson, Jr. / 888-564-6732

NOAA REQUESTS \$54 MILLION TO REDUCE FISHING EFFORT RFA Says Agency Seeking Congressional Aid to Destroy Fishing Communities

In a bold attempt to take control of our nation's coastal resources, NOAA Fisheries has asked Congress for an additional \$54 million in funding for catch shares, while simultaneously turning their back on the agency's scientific deficiencies in managing marine fisheries.

While Atlantic and Gulf Coast fishermen and legislators have openly rallied in opposition to this particular takeover scheme, NOAA Fisheries, led by an agenda-driven ideology to reduce fishing participation, continues to run roughshod over coastal constituents in clear violation of legislative order.

Appearing before a House Resource Committee hearing on October 26th in Washington, Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA) executive director Jim Donofrio blasted the NOAA administration for failing to adequately fund scientific efforts in coastal fisheries management. "NOAA claims they don't have enough money to do the stock assessments on the species they manage," Donofrio said in his official testimony, explaining how there are boats tied to the dock in coastal communities throughout the United States right now, unable to access healthy, rebuilt fisheries due to lack of science.

When the Magnuson Stevens Act was passed by unanimous consent in the Senate in 2006 and signed by President Bush in 2007, it required NOAA fisheries to overhaul their Marine Recreational Fishing Statistical Survey (MRFSS) by a time-specific deadline of January 1, 2009. Donofrio said NOAA officials have publicly stated on several occasions that a new Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) has not yet been implemented, despite the requirements set forth by Congress.

"Right now we don't have a data collection program that Congress mandated in the 2007 reauthorization for marine recreational statistics, the new MRIP program," Donofrio told Congress in October, adding "they're still using the MRFSS data and they're shutting down fisheries based on the MRFSS data."

Despite the woeful lack of science and analytical data needed to properly manage fisheries, NOAA has apparently gone to key members of the House and Senate in asking for additional funds for catch share programs which by design cap fishing participation by trading away ownership of fish stocks to select groups and individuals. Earlier this year, NOAA's administration under the leadership of Dr. Jane Lubchenco had attempted to misappropriate several million dollars away from NOAA's scientific budget to allocate towards catch shares, a move which was stymied by an act of Congress.

In February, the House voted 259-159 to cut off funding for future catch share programs which would've opened the door to commodities trading of fishermen's catch allocations - or worse, a complete buy-out of angler access by preservationist groups. The bipartisan budget amendment tied to NOAA's proposed catch share funding was sponsored by Republican Rep. Walter Jones of North Carolina, as well as a pair of coastal Democrats in Rep. Barney Frank of Massachusetts and Rep. Frank Pallone of New Jersey.

"We've heard from Congressman Jones this week who says that NOAA is courting legislators, asking for more money for catch share programs," Donofrio said. "These are the same programs that have driven Massachusetts legislators to seek \$21 million in directed economic relief from Washington to give to displaced fishermen, specifically because of these failed catch share policies enacted under the present NOAA administration."

[A letter co-signed on October 31](#) by 19 bipartisan coastal members of the House of Representatives calls on ranking members of the House to ensure that language is included in the 2012 appropriations bill which would restrict the use of funds for development or approval of new catch share programs for any fishery under the jurisdiction of the New England, Mid Atlantic or South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils.

"The last thing the American government should be doing in these economic times is spending millions of taxpayer dollars to expand programs that will be put even more Americans out of work," the letter says, explaining that that is exactly what NOAA is attempting to do by requesting \$54 million in its 2012 budget, "to accelerate implementation of new fisheries catch share programs across the U.S."

Donofrio said the RFA has already spoken to ranking members of the Senate who will be cosigning their support of the letter, and added that he and fellow fishermen will be reaching out to legislators in the Gulf of Mexico to rally support in opposition to catch share programs which take monies away from scientific efforts in that region.

"By commoditizing a public resource and placing share distinctions on individual fishes, what the catch share policy would do is give big corporations and wealthy non-profit groups the ability to buy up all the harvest for themselves, leaving individual anglers and coastal communities standing at the dock with nothing," Donofrio said. "This whole orchestrated effort by Dr. Lubchenco and her friends at Environmental Defense Fund is nothing more than a resource grab which will destroy our marine industry and take away access for millions of Americans."

"I can't fathom how Dr. Lubchenco can claim to support best available science when her Administration is asking Congress for money, not to improve stock assessments and data collection, but for coastal sharecropping schemes which will destroy our mom and pop businesses along the coast," Donofrio said.

(To see if your representative has signed visit www.joinrfa.org/press/CongressCatchShareLetter.pdf)

Find your Representative at www.house.gov/representatives and tell them, "*fishermen need money for better science, NOT programs that will put captains, tackle shops and marinas out of business while forcing anglers off the water.*" Catch shares will only protect the fish by destroying fishermen...it will hand ownership of the resource over to the few, the privileged, the elite, the preservationists and the corporations!!!

[JOIN RFA TODAY & HELP US SAY NO TO NOAA!](#)