

Year ends on a positive note for the fish

National Initiatives and Rhode Island Regulatory Updates

Capt. David Monti



National updates

Two initiatives underway in the U.S. House at the end of 2019 made the fish very happy: **Rep. Jared Huffman's** (D-CA) national listening tour and the Climate-Ready Fisheries Act sponsored by **Rep. Joe Cunningham** (D-SC). The spirit of both of these efforts embodies the non-partisan, inclusive, and science-based approach that has been the cornerstone of successful fisheries management in the U.S. Both initiatives will help us grow fish to abundance so there are more in the water for all to catch, eat or release.



Chair of House subcommittee reaches out to fishermen

A panel of scientists and fishing industry leaders met with Rep. Huffman, who is chair of the Water, Oceans and Wildlife Subcommittee of the House Natural Resources Committee, in Maryland on Friday, November 15 at his third listening session on the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the federal fishing law of this nation. The congressman held a fourth listening session on November 22 in Seattle, Washington, and two previous listening sessions in California. The panel of fisheries experts and stakeholders at the listening sessions had a detailed, technical discussion of current and future challenges in federal fisheries management and explored potential solutions.

Tony Friedrich, president of the American Saltwater Guides Association who participated in the November 15 Maryland session, said, "I was one of eight to ten people participating, some commercial and recreational fishermen, but most were fisheries scientists." Other recreational fishing representatives included **Capt. Paul Eidman** of New Jersey, and **Charlie Witek**, Esq. recreational angler and fish advocate from New York.

The listening tour is a part of Huffman's efforts to foster a more transparent and deliberative process for developing natural resources legislation. The input from this listening tour, and from other stakeholder outreach will inform his introduction of a Magnuson-Stevens reauthorization bill next spring. Through this comprehensive and inclusive approach, Huffman hopes to continue the historically bipartisan character of marine fisheries policies, including prior successful Magnuson-Stevens reauthorizations.

Friedrich said, "It was great for Rep. Huffman to solicit our input. Key issues discussed included climate change and how to handle shifting stocks, as well as the desire of recreational anglers to be accountable for the fish they harvest while still being concerned about current recreational data not being accurate."

The major issue discussed at the event was the Atlantic

States Marine Fisheries Commission's (ASMFC) inability to manage fisheries in state waters. Friedrich said, "All at the table wanted the ASMFC to be more accountable and manage fisheries more like fish are managed under the Magnuson-Stevens Act, which means no conservation equivalency without consequences, and adherence to allowable catch limits and rebuilding time lines. The ASMFC record is dismal."

Charles Witek, recreational fisherman, fish advocate and writer, said in an April 10, 2019 Marine Fish Conservation Network blog post, "While federal fishery managers, guided by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens), have already rebuilt at least 45 once-overfished stocks, ASMFC has only rebuilt a single stock, Atlantic striped bass, since it was created in 1942." Anglers made the point that the most recent striped bass stock assessment has revealed that even striped bass are once again overfished and subject to continued overfishing which precipitated a mandated 18 percent reduction for 2020.

Rep. Huffman said in his listening tour press release he plans to hold one public forum in each of the regions managed by fishery management councils. The Marine Fish Conservation Network is working with Huffman to identify events where listening sessions could occur in other regions such as New England and the Gulf.

Congress aims to help fishermen cope with climate change

Last year our oceans absorbed 93 percent of the heat our carbon emissions trapped in the atmosphere. The ocean would never release all this retained heat at once, but if the heat stored in the world's oceans since 1955 was instantly transferred, NOAA relates the atmosphere would warm by 65 degrees F.

With accelerated warming Rep. Joe Cunningham has introduced the **Climate-Ready Fisheries Act of 2019**, bipartisan legislation to help fisheries manage the current and anticipated impacts of climate change on the fish. (to page 29)



Warming water has brought an abundance of black sea bass to the northeast like this one caught by Lucia Wong of Cambridge, MA while fishing with Capt. Dave Monti