Legislation Advances to Benefit Saltwater Recreational Fishing

House Natural Resources Committee approves Magnuson-Stevens Act reauthorization bill

Washington, D.C. – May 1, 2015 – Leaders in the recreational fishing and boating community yesterday highlighted the progress in elevating the importance of saltwater recreational fishing in the nation’s primary law governing marine fisheries management. The U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Natural Resources yesterday approved a bill sponsored by Rep. Don Young (R-Alaska), H.R. 1335, to reauthorize the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), which addresses top priorities of the recreational fishing community.

These priorities were identified by the Commission on Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Management, also known as the Morris-Deal Commission after co-chairs Johnny Morris, founder and CEO of Bass Pro Shops, and Scott Deal, president of Maverick Boats. In 2014, the Morris-Deal Commission released “A Vision for Managing America’s Saltwater Recreational Fisheries,” which includes six key policy changes to produce the full range of saltwater recreational fishing’s social, economic and conservation benefits to the nation.

“The recreational fishing community owes a debt of gratitude to Chairman Rob Bishop and Congressman Don Young for incorporating meaningful changes to recreational fisheries management into the reauthorization of the nation’s marine fisheries law,” said Jeff Angers, president of the Center for Coastal Conservation. “The Morris-Deal Report set forth a vision for the future of saltwater recreational fishing, and this bill would help to achieve that vision.”

“The nation’s 11 million saltwater recreational anglers have a $70 billion economic impact annually and support 450,000 jobs,” said Mike Nussman, president and CEO of the American Sportfishing Association. “However, federal marine fisheries management has never sufficiently acknowledged the importance of recreational fishing to the nation. H.R. 1335 would enact many of the necessary changes to elevate saltwater recreational fishing to the level it deserves.”

The recommendations of the Morris-Deal Commission include:

- Establishing a national policy for recreational fishing
- Adopting a revised approach to saltwater recreational fisheries management
- Allocating marine fisheries for the greatest benefit to the nation
- Creating reasonable latitude in stock rebuilding timelines
• Codifying a process for cooperative management
• Managing for the forage base

“Management that emphasizes conservation and abundance, and allows for consistent access to public resources for saltwater anglers, was at the heart of the recommendations made by the Morris-Deal Commission,” said Whit Fosburgh, president and CEO of the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership. “Including those recommendations into legislation aimed at improving our nation’s fisheries management means Congress is recognizing the importance of angling to American culture and our economy.”

"The broad coalition of leading recreational fishing and boating organizations that has come together to support our community's priorities should be pleased with this bill," said Jim Donofrio, executive director of the Recreational Fishing Alliance. "RFA is proud to have participated as part of this coalition."

One of the recommendations of the Morris-Deal Commission was addressed by an amendment offered by Congressman Jeff Duncan (R-S.C.) that would prompt a review of quota allocations in fisheries in the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico with both a commercial and recreational component. Despite the tremendous importance that allocation decisions have in maximizing the benefits that our fisheries provide to the nation, federal fisheries managers have not revisited allocations – most of which were determined decades ago – primarily because of a lack of clear guidance on how decisions should be made and because these decisions are inherently difficult.

“Congressman Duncan's amendment is a significant achievement for ensuring that the benefits of our nation's fisheries are maximized,” said Jeff Crane, president of the Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation. “For far too long, allocations have been rusted shut, and we applaud Congressman Duncan for his leadership on this critically important issue.”

A separate amendment offered by Congressman Garret Graves (R-La.) that would transfer management Gulf of Mexico red snapper to the five Gulf states failed to be included. However, there was widespread agreement expressed by committee members that Gulf red snapper management is broken and in need of significant changes.

"Rep. Graves is a great leader for sportsmen and women in the Gulf Coast,” said Angers. “He understands the challenges of sound resource management and is working to get anglers back on the water.”

“We hope that as MSA moves forward there will be additional opportunities to enact the Gulf states' plan,” said Patrick Murray, president of the Coastal Conservation Association. “MSA’s reauthorization surely has a long road ahead, but H.R. 1335 provides the recreational fishing community with a very solid first step.”

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