

THE MAGNUSON-STEVENS ACT REAUTHORIZATION DRAFT

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) is the country's primary statute governing fisheries management in federal waters and has made the United States a world leader in sustainable fisheries. Despite the strengths of the MSA, it was last reauthorized in 2006 and updates are needed to address the many new challenges facing fisheries management and science in an era of climate change, new technologies, and changing ocean use. This reauthorization has taken a stakeholder-driven, science-based approach to provide important and timely updates to the MSA. The viewpoints and proposals heard during discussions, listening sessions, and public comments have resulted in a comprehensive discussion draft. In addition, several bipartisan bills introduced during the 116th Congress are included in whole or in part. These amendments to the MSA, along with provisions to support coastal communities and fishing businesses, are intended to address the changing needs in fisheries management and science to ensure the MSA meets the needs of stakeholders now and into the future.

Title I. Climate-ready fisheries: Requires consideration of climate change and climate science in regional fishery management council priorities and planning and provides new tools and approaches to address shifting stocks and other climate impacts on fisheries management. Tackling climate change is crucial as oceans and fisheries are facing some of the largest impacts due to ocean warming, acidification, and other climate stressors.

Title II. Supporting fishing communities: Addresses the needs of fishermen, businesses, and coastal communities through an improved disaster relief program, creates a working waterfront grant program, and increases support for seafood marketing. This title also acknowledges the importance of subsistence fishing and how it is defined under the MSA.

Title III. Strengthening public process and transparency: Increases representation of different viewpoints on regional fishery management councils and improves transparency, accountability, and stakeholder participation in fisheries management. This title expands coverage of NOAA's sexual assault and sexual harassment policies, including for fishery observers and Council staff.

Title IV. Modernizing fisheries science and data: Expands electronic technologies and data management systems, updates cooperative research and management, and improves data collection and methods. This title requires NOAA to develop operating plans for emergencies that make it impractical to use human observers and conduct stock assessments, as occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Title V. Sustaining fisheries through healthy ecosystems and improved management: Strengthens essential fish habitat consultation, builds on MSA conservation standards to improve outcomes for overfishing and rebuilding, conserves forage fish, and requires descending devices for recreational fishing in the Gulf of Mexico. This title also replaces the term "overfished" with "depleted" to encompass the complexity of threats to fish stocks.