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U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

Opening Statement of
Chairman Doc Hastings
Committee on Natural Resources
On Wednesday, September 11, 2013
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Committee on Natural Resources Oversight Hearing on
“The Reauthorization of the
Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act”

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This is the fourth oversight hearing we have held this Congress on the reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act – the primary statute governing the harvest of U.S. fisheries.

This Act governs both the recreational and commercial harvest of fisheries in Federal waters and the Act significantly affects many coastal communities. It requires that fishery managers balance the biological needs of the fish with the economic needs of fishermen. The Act also requires that fishery managers base the management decisions on science. Over the last three years, legitimate questions have been raised about whether the data being used to make management decisions is sound. Further, many are concerned that the balance between fish and fishermen has shifted. At a time when fisheries jobs and the economic activity they create are critical to keeping our coastal communities alive, it is important that we ensure the laws and regulations that govern these activities are not unnecessarily rigid.

Last week, the Ocean Studies Board of the National Academies of Sciences released a report titled “*Evaluating the Effectiveness of Fish Stock Rebuilding Plans in the United States.*” This is not the first time the Ocean Studies Board has weighed in on fisheries management issues. Congress and NOAA have asked the Board to study tough issues on a number of occasions. This most recent report comes at a perfect time.

While I don’t want to pre-empt the testimony of the report’s co-chair, I believe the report tracks what we have been hearing both during Congressional hearings and at the Managing Our Nations Fisheries conference. Generally, the report correctly finds that while the 2006/2007 amendments were well intentioned, some modifications should be considered to give fishery managers additional flexibility to deal with the complexities of fisheries.

In particular, we have heard testimony that the Act’s rebuilding provisions are too rigid and are causing unnecessary economic hardship during rebuilding periods. The Ocean Studies Board report examined this aspect of the Act and today we will hear from Dr. Patrick

Sullivan, the Co-Chair of the committee who has spent a lot of time and effort examining the effectiveness of the rebuilding provisions and will offer some recommendations on whether Congress should consider additional flexibility in those provisions.

Since we last met to discuss the Magnuson-Stevens Act, a number of things have occurred which are not necessarily the direct topic of today's hearing, but are issues that are on Members' minds and relate to the reauthorization of the Act.

The first issue relates to the topic of our last hearing on the management of red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico. Last week, the State of Louisiana announced it no longer had confidence in the Federal recreational data collection program and that it would no longer participate in that program. I hesitate to ask the National Academies of Sciences to take on another task, but it appears that the recreational data collection recommendations that you issued in 2006 have not been adequately implemented by NOAA, and perhaps a fresh look at the data collection needs in the Gulf of Mexico is warranted.

Seven years after Congress told NOAA to create a better recreational data collection program, based on the National Academies' recommendations, little has changed since 2006: recreational fishermen doubt the data and managers continue to be forced to make decisions without adequate or real-time data. Management cannot happen without sound data and fishermen must trust the science for management measures to be effective.

Second, at a time when we are asking fishery managers to increase the amount and types of data they collect, concerns have been raised about how proprietary and sensitive information is protected by those managers. This is delicate balancing act and I hope NOAA will proceed with caution.

With that, I look forward to hearing from today's witnesses.