



# PRESS RELEASE

## Recreational Fishing Alliance

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### **RFA CONTINUES TO PRESS FOR COMPREHENSIVE FISHERIES REFORM Angler Advocacy Group Says ACL's, AM's & Arbitrary Deadlines Are Killing Industry**

Ever since President Bush signed off on the 2007 reauthorization of the Magnuson Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSRA), the Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA) has been loudly sounding the alarm with regard to diminishing angler access. While touted by some groups as a big win for recreational fishermen in America, RFA quickly warned that MSRA's strict annual catch limits, accountability measures and arbitrary management timelines would eventually take their toll on the recreational fishing industry.

"During discussions leading up to Magnuson's passage and signing into law, the RFA was deliberate in pointing out that some of the proposed provisions in MSRA would not promote efficient management of the recreational fishing sector," RFA Executive Director Jim Donofrio noted in a letter to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) just two months after the signing of the new law.

"Some measures of the newly reauthorized law have the potential to create negative long-term impacts on the recreational fishing sector without any conservation benefit or real improvement to our domestic fisheries in return. This is particularly worrisome with the issue of annual catch limits (ACL) and accounting measures (AM) contained within MSRA," Donofrio said in an April 7, 2007 letter to NMFS official Mark Millikin.

An outspoken critic of the more restrictive version of MSRA passed by the Senate, Donofrio had lobbied extensively on behalf of RFA members to incorporate additional management flexibility into the law, explaining in his 2007 letter to NMFS that "Consistent with our position in the final discussion of MSRA, we believe these management tools, though easily applied to commercial fisheries, are inappropriate for the recreational sector."

Recognizing that rigid timelines would lead to more fishing closures throughout the country, Rep. Frank Pallone (D-NJ) introduced the Flexibility in Rebuilding American Fisheries Act of 2007 to bring much-needed flexibility to MSRA. It was clear at the time to those intimately involved with the recreational fishing industry that ACLs coupled with AMs and a lack of flexibility with rebuilding timeframes was going to have profoundly negative impacts on the industry, and the looming crisis spurred support from hundreds of individual fishing organizations and coastal businesses for Pallone's efforts.

"This legislation is the best way to rebuild our fisheries without bankrupting tackle shops, party boats and commercial fishermen," Pallone said at the time, adding "We should be using sound biology and science when deciding how best to rebuild fish stocks. Unfortunately, the current process of managing our nation's fisheries is based on arbitrary deadlines set by Congress, which has continued to negatively impact fishing communities."

Sen. Charles Schumer (D-NY) would go on to support a Senate version of the so-called Flexibility Act in 2009, and in the years to follow the RFA would continue to lead the federal fisheries reform charge, calling on legislators to introduce management flexibility into the federal fisheries law on behalf of beleaguered coastal fishing communities throughout the U.S.

*“I believe we must improve stock assessments and data collection for all marine species. It is in the best interest to manage the nation’s resources with the best information available. However, these improvements, no matter how substantial will never eliminate uncertainty. For this reason, managers must have flexibility.”*  
- Donofrio testimony before Congress, June 18, 2007.

*“RFA believes that accountability measures are appropriate so long as accurate and reliable monitoring programs are in place prior. In addition, the application of accountability is innately tied to quotas based on pounds of fish landed. To date, no system has been established in the recreational fishery that can record individual weights for every recreationally landed fish. Accountability can only be implemented when monitoring achieves this level of accuracy in a poundage context.”*  
- Donofrio testimony before Congress, October 27, 2009.

*“RFA can identify only five of the 18 NRC (National Research Council) recommendations as being fully or partially implemented since the release of their findings back in 2006. Just as ACL and AM are mandated in MSRA, so are recreational data collection improvements, but there appears to be selective implementation of MSRA and specifically with red snapper, moving forward with AM and ACL before improving the primary data collection source for which to monitor this fishery.”*  
- RFA official comments to NMFS in October, 2009.

In 2011, RFA continues to press federal legislators in both the House and Senate on comprehensive reform of the Magnuson Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act in order to address unfair annual catch limits in the recreational sector, over burdensome deadlines, and damaging accountability measures which arbitrarily force anglers to give back quotas whenever random data deems it necessary.

“We’ve seen more and more piecemeal efforts to address certain aspects of Magnuson, but RFA will continue to lobby on behalf of comprehensive fisheries reform,” Donofrio said this week. “Our recreational fishing industry is being regulated out of existence, and all the Band-Aids in the box won’t save each of America’s coastal fishermen from the death of a thousand cuts.”

Donofrio said several coastal legislators have reacted positively to angler concerns regarding NMFS’ inability to keep fisheries open in the face of restrictive federal language, praising the support of Congressional representatives likes Jon Runyan (R-NJ), John Mica (R-FL), Walter Jones (D-NC) and others for spearheading individual reform efforts to address MSRA shortcomings.

“It’s unfortunate that it took complete closures in many important recreational fisheries for some organizations and legislators to understand how damaging some of those MSRA provisions were to the recreational sector,” Donofrio said, while adding “it is encouraging however to see some of the same groups that fiercely opposed Magnuson reform now starting to accept that RFA’s claims were in fact reality and that federal fisheries reform is desperately needed.”

“We need deadline flexibility, we need to get rid of the accountability measures based on flawed science, and we have to address the problems with annual catch limits in the recreational sector where rebuilt fish stocks are concerned,” he added. “Some say it’s a lot to ask, but we’re going to need it all if we want to save coastal jobs and keep our members fishing in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.”

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*The Recreational Fishing Alliance is a national, grassroots political action organization representing recreational fishermen and the recreational fishing industry on marine fisheries issues. RFA’s Mission is to safeguard the rights of saltwater anglers, protect marine, boat and tackle industry jobs, and ensure the long-term sustainability of our Nation’s saltwater fisheries. For more information, call 888-JOIN-RFA or visit [www.joinrfa.org](http://www.joinrfa.org).*