



## House approves overhaul to Magnuson-Stevens

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The House approved legislation to overhaul the nation's major fishing law, passing the update largely along party lines as lawmakers continued to spar over how best to oversee the country's fisheries.

H.R. 200, the "Strengthening Fishing Communities and Increasing Flexibility in Fisheries Management Act," passed the House on a 222-193 vote.

"My legislation, H.R. 200, would make a number of improvements to the original act, in order to ensure a proper balance between the biological needs of fish stocks and the economic needs of fishermen and coastal communities," said the bill's sponsor, Alaska Rep. Don Young (R), who noted his role sponsoring the original Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976.

In remarks on the House floor, Young acknowledged the controversial nature of the legislation that marks the culmination of months of debate and nearly six years of negotiations but argued his bill makes needed updates to add more flexibility for the domestic seafood industry.

Backers of the reauthorization bill have argued that the law, last reauthorized in 2006, had become too bureaucratic and cumbersome for both commercial and recreational fishermen.

Young's update would give more control to states and regions to set rules for fishing in federal waters.

Democrats have mocked Young's bill as the "empty oceans act," saying that the proposal would reduce the quality of science used to make decisions on fishing quotas, prevent overfishing and restore depleted fish populations.

"The framework of Magnuson[-Stevens] is working," Colorado Rep. Jared Polis (D) said on the House floor. "We talked about the increase in boat sales, we've talked about the increase in jobs, we've talked about the benefit to consumers. I'm sure there is some fine-tuning to do. But not time to push the reset button and start over down a very dangerous path that would destroy jobs and the entire economies of many of our local communities."

In remarks later in the day, Young pushed back against his critics.

"What hurts me, I've heard them say it removes science from fisheries," Young said, noting that the words "science" and "data" appear in the bill nearly three dozen times. "This is about states, coastal areas, villages, communities, fishermen, making decisions instead of the federal government."

He added: "They really don't have a concrete reason to object to this bill other than what they're being told by those that don't want commercial fishing, and they don't want recreational fishing. ... The reality is that's really what they're seeking."

During floor debate, California Democratic Rep. Jimmy Gomez sought to force an amendment to the legislation that would have put more focus on President Trump's recent threat to enact an additional \$200 billion of tariffs on Chinese exports, including fish.

Gomez sponsored a motion to recommit that would have allowed a vote on H.R. 200 while adding language to allow the Commerce Department to declare a "fishery disaster" should the industry suffer "negative impacts" from those tariffs.

"This administration's trade policy shows a lack of strategy and planning that risks putting working families last and threatens our economy," Gomez said.

Young criticized the motion as "a procedural trick to delay passage."

"Let's not kid ourselves," he added. "If you listened to the presentation, it has nothing to do with the fish bill."

The motion failed, 228 to 186.

Among the two dozen lawmakers who split from their respective parties on the final vote on H.R. 200 were 15 Republicans and nine Democrats.

Democrats who supported the bill were Texas Reps. Gene Green and Marc Veasey, both of whom co-sponsored the legislation, as well as Reps. Frank Pallone of New Jersey, Brian Higgins of New York, Collin Peterson of Minnesota, Joe Courtney of Connecticut, Stephen Lynch of Massachusetts, and Vicente Gonzalez and Henry Cuellar of Texas.

Republicans who opposed the legislation were Texas Reps. John Carter, John Culberson, Randy Weber and Kay Granger; Florida Reps. Vern Buchanan, Gus Bilirakis, Carlos Curbelo, Mario Diaz-Balart, Francis Rooney and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen; Pennsylvania Reps. Ryan Costello and Brian Fitzpatrick; New Jersey Rep. Leonard Lance; Minnesota Rep. Erik Paulsen; and South Carolina Rep. Mark Sanford.

Fishing groups serve up mixed reaction

Saving Seafood's National Coalition for Fishing Communities, which advocates for the fishing industry, praised the bill, pointing to provisions that would "create flexibility without compromising conservation."

Those changes include a shift from a 10-year timeline for rebuilding fisheries to a "biologically based time frame" determined by regional fishery management councils. Other changes include allowing management councils to consider "ecosystem changes and the needs of fishing communities" when setting annual catch limits.

The advocacy group also touted the use of the term "depleted" rather than "overfished" in Young's bill.

"The term 'overfished' is perceived negatively and can unfairly implicate the industry for stock conditions resulting from other factors," the group said in a statement.

Sportfishing advocates similarly praised the House bill, noting that it incorporated H.R. 2023, the "Modernizing Recreational Fisheries Management Act," which would give sports anglers more access to federally controlled waters.

The act "represents the collective priorities of the recreational fishing community for improving federal marine fisheries management," said American Sportfishing Association President Glenn Hughes, who pointed to the \$63 billion economic impact of the 11 million saltwater fishermen.

He added, "This legislation will help ensure that the economic, conservation and social values of saltwater recreational fishing will continue well into the future."

But the Fishing Communities Coalition, which advocates for small-boat commercial fishing operators, voiced opposition to the legislation for siding with recreational groups at the expense of commercial fishermen.

"It would be a major mistake to turn back the clock and weaken the protections responsible for rebuilding our nation's most valuable fisheries, including American red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico," said Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Shareholders' Alliance Deputy Director Eric Brazer.

In a statement released by the Fishing Communities Coalition, he added: "Eliminating accountability for recreational catch could lead to unsustainable fishing practices that would hurt all fishermen and put our small family businesses in harms way."

Environmentalists likewise disparaged the House legislation, arguing that it would undermine sustainable fisheries.

"The Magnuson-Stevens Act has succeeded in reversing overfishing and bringing back fisheries abundance in the U.S.," said Oceana Campaign Director Whitney Webber. "However, H.R. 200 would undo the significant progress we've made over the past several decades for the health of America's fisheries and fishermen."

She added: "This bill would weaken science-based conservation of U.S. fish populations, decrease accountability and increase the risk of overfishing by removing annual catch limits for many species."

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