NOAA FISHERIES

"U.S. Fisheries: Building on our Progress, Achieving our Potential"

Managing Our Nation's Fisheries 3 Conference Keynote

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Good morning. I want to thank Chairman Hastings for his remarks today. We work closely with Congress on many issues and depend upon their leadership, and I appreciate him taking the time to provide a valuable perspective on U.S. fisheries management.

I also want to thank Don McIsaac and all of the Pacific Fishery Management Council staff who worked very hard to make this event happen. A lot of people contributed to what I am sure will be a very successful meeting, but at the center of it all was the Pacific Council, and I want to thank them for all of their hard work in getting us here today.

On behalf of the NOAA team and the entire Administration, I want to welcome each of you here. Thank you for taking the time out of your busy lives to come here this week to talk, think, and problem solve with us about the future of our nation's fisheries and the communities that depend on them.

One of my personal goals for this conference – when we began planning it several years ago – was to take this moment to focus not only on what we have achieved, but also to focus on the big challenges yet in front of us. By bringing together the very people who are both seeing the progress and dealing with the big challenges, we can chart the most effective way forward. This morning, I am going to help frame the work before us - - noting our progress, identifying some of our big challenges, and sharing some initial thoughts regarding a path forward.

But, before I do that, I want to emphasize that all of the progress we have made, and the hard work yet in front of us begins and ends with people. People like the NOAA scientists and managers, people in academic institutions advancing our understanding of the state of our fisheries, fishermen, advocacy organizations, our state partners, political and community leaders, and many others. There are two such people who were tremendous influences on me both personally and professionally, who are not with us this morning. Both passed away earlier this year.

Larry Simns was a fourth-generation waterman from tiny Rock Hall, Maryland, and was best known as the first and only President of the Maryland Waterman's Association. It's hard to capture the essence of Larry in a few words, but I think the Bay Journal may have done it best in its tribute to him describing him as, "… a passionate defender of the Bay's watermen, known for building consensus with agencies in the mutual battle to save Chesapeake's degraded waters." Larry was a fisherman first, but also a man who worked tirelessly to represent the interests of all of Maryland's watermen in ways that reflect the very foundation of this meeting—fisheries sustainability—for both current and future generations of fishermen.

Many of you who know me also know that I have great respect for the role of our state partners in the fisheries management process. For over 30 years, Larry Simpson defined the very best of state engagement in fisheries management. As Executive Director of the Gulf States Fisheries Commission, he led the Commission's work to promote the conservation, development, and full utilization of the fishery resources of the Gulf of Mexico to provide food, employment, and recreation to the people of the United States. And he did so during often very challenging times for the Gulf and its fishermen.

Both of these men demonstrated great skill at carving out consensus and had innate ability to see not only how things were, but also how they could be…. Their example can be a model for us as we continue working in partnership to sustain our Nation's fisheries.

This conference is designed to be forward looking. But to look to the future, we need to know where we have been.

Just last week, we released our annual Report to Congress on the Status of U.S. Fisheries. This report documents the strength of this country's science-based fisheries management process to prevent overfishing, rebuild depleted stocks, and ensure sustainable harvest levels for the long-term. The report highlights the continued, significant progress that collectively, NOAA Fisheries, the Regional Fishery Management Councils, commercial and recreational fishermen, and many others have made to end overfishing and rebuild stocks.

Overfishing is at an all-time low, and this year we report that 90% of the stocks with a known status are not subject to overfishing. 90%! 2012 was the first full year that all federal fisheries operated under annual catch limits to end and prevent overfishing. This marked a milestone in fisheries management, establishing a dynamic science-based process that both prevents overfishing and responds when it occurs. In fact, overfishing has ended for 58% percent of the domestic stocks that were subject to overfishing in 2007, when the Magnuson Stevens Act was last reauthorized, and we expect the number of stocks currently on the overfishing list to decrease further as a result of management under annual catch limits.

There are long-term benefits of ending overfishing and rebuilding stocks. Since 2000, we have rebuilt 32 fish stocks. This isn't just about fish. This is also about the economic success that follows once a stock is sustainable, our commercial fleets can bring fish to the dock safely and consistently, and communities can depend upon good recreational fishing for tourism benefits and quality time on the water with friends and family.

The results of well managed fisheries yield great benefit to fishing communities and the U.S. economy. In 2011, the commercial and recreational fishing industries, and the associated businesses, played an enormous role in driving the U.S. economy, generating more than $199 billion in sales and supporting 1.7 million jobs. Based on the latest figures, U.S. commercial and recreational saltwater fisheries added 200,000 jobs to the economy between 2010 and 2011.

Effective management results require good science. Over 100 stocks assessments are successfully updated each year, and we are working hard to continue to improve stock assessments—both in quantity and quality—in the future by improving technology for data collection, improving assessment models and methodologies, and pursuing "next generation stock assessments" that better account for how ecosystem changes impact fish stocks. A solid understanding of the ecosystem foundation for fishery resources, and productive habitats that support fishery resources, are also critical for success.

The best management takes advantage of flexible tools that can be applied to meet the many different management objectives for fisheries around our very diverse nation. Catch share programs are one such tool. And they are currently used in 15 fisheries managed by six regional fishery management councils. While not appropriate for all fisheries, and even where appropriate, they are certainly not "one size fits all solutions" - - well designed catch share systems are better aligning long term sustainability goals with the immediate and long term business interests of many fishermen. They are helping to eliminate overfishing and achieve annual catch limits, produce more fish at lower costs, improve fishermen's safety and profits, and provide much needed flexibility to fishing businesses.

And in the international arena, through our nation's hard work to address Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated, or IUU fishing, we are helping fishermen who are complying with strict domestic standards to be competitive—operating on a more level playing field.

I've mentioned this once already, but I must do it again. All of these successes can be credited to the Fishery Management Councils, to our state and academic partners, to fishermen, to all participants in process. In fisheries, it's the hard work of individuals, and the collective work of partnerships, that lay the foundation for success.

Now, whenever we talk of the recent success—we are reminded quickly of the many places and the many ways where results have not been what we all had hoped for … and even where significant progress has been, this progress has not come without cost.

Fishermen, fishing communities, and the Councils have had to make difficult decisions and many areas have had to absorb the cost of conservation and investment in long-term economic and biological sustainability.

The start of the new groundfish season last week in New England again brought these challenges into sharp focus. We've had to implement strict catch limits for the 2013 fishing year for several key groundfish stocks that, despite the best efforts of all involved have not recovered. At the same time, red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico present a different problem. While rebuilding is clearly underway, and even as catches increase, we are struggling to strike a balance between reaching an agreed upon rebuilding target and providing access to a rebuilding stock.

We have come far together, and although there are still many challenges to face together, we are on the right course. Now is the time to focus on how to make the system and the processes work better. That is the primary purpose of our gathering here this week. We are here for an open and constructive dialogue about how to address these challenges, and to identify the right steps to move into the future.

So what are some of the challenges? Let me offer eight for consideration.

- **How to manage for stability in the face of Dynamic Ecosystems:** The marine environment and ecosystems are dynamic, and we don't have all the tools we need to predict changes, understand their effects on stocks, and develop appropriate management response. If we fail to better address these issues, fisheries will suffer.

- **How do we react when the stocks do not respond as expected?** Despite our efforts to manage using scientific guidance, for some stocks, there is no or minimal biological response. We have got to find better ways to minimize these occurrences, better explain them when they happen and identify corrective actions.

- **Demand for Info:** And, despite the best work of our scientists, it is hard to keep up with the information needs. More sophisticated stock assessment, information intensive management systems and changing conditions demand progress here.

- **Budget challenges:** Current budgets are under significant downward pressure. We have shown that fisheries investments yield dividends. How do we continue to meet science and management needs more efficiently and continue to secure the resources needed to assess stocks, monitor fisheries, and understand socio-economic needs?

- **Need for more Flexibility:** Despite the best efforts of managers to be flexible, this is not a system that supports quick reaction to changing circumstances. How do we improve our ability to react to changes responsibly, but more quickly?

- **Habitat:** Habitat challenges are hindering the rebuilding of some stocks, impacting long term stock productivity in other places, and reducing the resiliency of ecosystems to respond to change. every indication is that habitat challenges will become an even greater part of fisheries management going forward.

- **Support for US Aquaculture:** U.S. demand for seafood is ever increasing. Imports are higher than they have ever been, and over half of those imports are farmed in other countries. So, while we have NOAA and Department of Commerce aquaculture policies and are working with states to streamline regulatory systems, we still do not have all the tools we need to support a vibrant aquaculture industry in the US. We all recognize that there is great promise in having a sustainable US industry that creates jobs and economic opportunities, but the road to get there is not easy.

- **Addressing the different and growing needs of recreational fisheries:** Recreational fishing is an important social activity for individuals, families, and communities, and it is a critical economic driver of and contributor to local and regional economies, as well as the national economy. We need to ensure that these opportunities continue to build while maintaining sustainable catch levels. We also need to better understand and manage for the unique needs of recreational fisheries.

These are only some of the challenges we face. As we get into individual sessions this week, these and other issues will be front and center.

So all of that brings us here today. As we have in advance of past reauthorizations, we have worked closely with the Councils to organize this conversation. It is important to us and to the Councils to bring all of you together to talk about the future of fisheries science and management, specifically about how we continue to build on our success and address some of the pressing challenges.

The conference is organized around three theme areas of this conference—you could say three 'challenge' areas:

- **First: Fishery Management Essentials**— these sessions are focused on the foundations of science, management and compliance that have gotten us to this point. Yet it is clear that in each of these areas we can do better.

- **Second: Ecosystem Based Decision Making**—there is no question that many of our big challenges going forward go well beyond catch limits and accountability measures. Warming and more acidic

oceans, competition for forage species and declining inshore and ocean habitat will be a big part of our future. We must prepare more effectively to anticipate and address these challenges.

- **Third: Fishing Community Stability**—Social and economic tradeoffs, allocation issues, balancing the needs of commercial, recreational and subsistence uses, and, most importantly, increasing community resilience and stability are critical issues for our future.

In each of these areas there is opportunity. At NOAA, we have continued to seek ways to move forward. Some apparent … some less so. Some yielding great benefit, others still works in progress. But I do want to spend just a few minutes on four key areas of focus that might hold promise.

We must continue to seek ways to improve the timely collection of data, develop more robust and frequent stock assessments, and translate those data and assessments into management actions. From MRIP to better use of alternative survey methodologies to increased use of electronic monitoring, opportunities exist to move forward—even more aggressively than we have to date.

Secondly, even as we regularly increase the number of assessed stocks, we recognize the gap between what we have and the total number of stocks under federal management. Councils and the agency have worked to find creative and effective ways to manage those stocks for which we lack current assessments. Some of those approaches have included effective use of ecosystem component stocks or through developing effective proxies for stocks with long histories of relatively stable landings. We must continue to explore this area to ensure sustainable management for all federally managed stocks.

Third, we must make more rapid progress in improving our understanding of environmental factors that impact fishery resources. Councils are making great progress in understanding and reacting to ecosystem changes. More needs to be done—and it starts with a foundation of good science.

Finally, we must find ways to better address fishing community stability. Action in many areas will help, but in the end we need to find ways to dampen the current volatility in catch limits and the effects of accountability measures. Where significant decreases are necessary, we must work closely together to mitigate economic impacts in ways that sustain fishing communities even in the face of changing environmental, social and economic conditions.

Looking back to 1976, when the Magnuson-Stevens Act was initially passed, the legislation charted a groundbreaking course for sustainable fisheries. When the MSA was reauthorized in 2007, the Act gave the eight Regional Fishery Management councils and NOAA a very clear charge and some new tools to support improved science and management:

- It mandated the use of science-based annual catch limits and accountability measures to prevent and end overfishing;
- Provided for market-based fishery management through Limited Access Privilege Programs (or catch shares);
- Focused on collaborative research with the fishing industry and bycatch reduction, addressed the need to improve the science used to inform fisheries management; and,
- Sought to end illegal fishing and bycatch problems around the globe so that foreign fishing fleets are held to the same standards as—and do not economically disadvantage—U.S. fleets.

With that in mind, let's remind ourselves that the purpose of this conference is to look to the future of US fishing and the MSA. Let's learn where we can make improvements under current authorities, or where we

need delve into new areas to do what needs to be done. Let's ask ourselves, what will the next reauthorization accomplish? What will be our legacy?

I do not have any preconceived ideas about what could come out of the discussion we're going to be having over the next two days. I will be listening to what is said here to inform how NOAA Fisheries moves forward, and also how we might engage in upcoming discussions about Magnuson-Stevens Act reauthorization.

We are excited to hear from all of you. I know all of our speakers and panelists were charged with bringing one new idea to the discussion, and I hope many of you are planning to do the same. We have the people in the room who will bring the right leadership.

As participants in this conference, I ask that you participate in a thoughtful dialogue about how to build on our successes and address the challenges that face us to continue to advance sustainability of US fisheries. To be successful, we need to listen to other people's ideas and understand their perspectives, and find the truth in each of those ideas and perspectives. Everyone has something important to say and a reason why that idea is important to them. I am here to hear those ideas and consider the possibilities in them, and I hope I can challenge all of you to do the same.

Thank you.