

Joint Ocean Commission Initiative

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Progress Made on Magnuson-Stevens Act Senate Mark Up Provisions on Science Must be Further Strengthened

Bipartisan Initiative Commends Senate Commerce Leadership House Should Follow Senate's Lead and Take Up Fisheries Legislation

Washington, DC – Progress on the fisheries management act is very promising, but the provisions on science must be strengthened was the message of the bipartisan Joint Ocean Commission as the Senate Commerce Committee marked up the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Reauthorization Act of 2005.

“Chairman Ted Stevens (R-AK) and Co-Chair, Senator Daniel Inouye (D-HI) should be praised for their strong bipartisan leadership in soliciting broad input into the mark up of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Reauthorization Act of 2005,” said Admiral James D. Watkins (Ret.) Co-Chair of the Initiative with the Honorable Leon E. Panetta. “The support for the bill is a direct reflection of their concerted effort to reach out the entire stakeholder community.”

Watkins and Panetta believe the bill shows continuing forward progress incorporating many recommendations made by the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy. The bill does not fully address all of the Commission's recommendations, but with each new iteration the bill is being further strengthened.

“We are very pleased by the addition of language encouraging transition toward ecosystem-based management, a process that is further along in some Councils, such as the North Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council,” said Panetta. “This approach is the basis of both the US Commission and Pew Oceans Commission recommendations.”

Ecosystem-based management measures added to the bill include authorizing Councils to consider the variety of ecological factors affecting fishery populations; requiring a study on the state of ecosystem science, and authorizing the National Marine Fisheries Service to support regional ecosystem pilot projects. However, the one outstanding issue is providing additional funding to support these activities as well as other provisions that strengthen fisheries-related management and science.

“We will continue to press for additional enhancements to the bill as it moves through the Senate, particularly in regards to strengthening provisions to ensure that the best available science is used to make conservation decisions,” continued Watkins. “Overall we are very pleased to see the Senate taking action to aggressively to move this and other ocean-related legislation.”

“We are hopeful the House will follow the Senate’s lead and take up the challenge to get a Magnuson-Stevens reauthorization bill enacted early in 2006,” Panetta continued. “Then we can take up other important legislation, such as a NOAA Organic Act, authorization of an Integrated Ocean Observing System, and hopefully, accession to United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.”

The primary goal of the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative is to accelerate the pace of change that results in meaningful ocean policy reform. The Initiative will realize this goal by tapping into and working closely with networks of people involved in local, state, and regional ocean issues, thereby facilitating progress in the regions while building durable support for the Initiative’s national priorities. The Initiative also will pursue movement on select national ocean policy issues based on the Commissions’ core priorities.

The Joint Ocean Commission Initiative is uniquely positioned to accelerate the pace of positive change. The Commissioners involved bring extraordinary expertise, perspective, relationships, and diversity of interest to ocean and coastal policy reform. This foundation can serve as the basis for a greatly expanded understanding of the critical issues facing our oceans and action at regional and national levels to address these problems.

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