

Statement of William Dodds
Before the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy
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Mr. Chairman, Commissioners, I appreciate the opportunity to speak before the Commission on behalf of the Coastal Conservation Association (CCA). CCA is a national marine conservation organization with 80,000 individual members on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts and has been involved in the management of the nation's fisheries on behalf of recreational fishermen since its inception in 1977. I have provided each of you with an information sheet that briefly explains our organization and some of the issues we have been involved in.

I am the Chairman of CCA South Carolina, one of the fifteen constituent state organizations of CCA. I am also a member of the CCA national board and national government relations committee. The views I am presenting today are the views of our organization, however I anticipate that, as you hold more hearings, you will hear from more of our members about our concerns for the conservation of the nation's living marine resources and the role of the recreational angler in them.

I think it is useful to briefly address what we see as one of the key issues facing both the Commission and the nation regarding marine fisheries management -- utilization of our coastal resources is expanding at an unbelievable rate. 185 million people visit the coasts annually. An amazing 85 percent of tourist-related revenues nationwide occurs in coastal states. This coastal tourism accounts for as much as \$52 billion in economic activity, according to a Sea Grant study. Much of this economic activity can be attributed to boating and fishing recreation. It is not coincidence that waterfront coastal property is becoming a rare and costly commodity. The bottomline is that America's general public is moving to the coasts. Traditionally small, commercial-fishing harbors in New England, South Atlantic, Northwest and beyond are becoming hotspots for coastal development and economic growth. This move is based on the lifestyle provided by the water. And as the statistics indicate, this lifestyle is centered on recreational fishing and boating. The response the government takes to this increase in pressure on coastal resources will have a direct impact on the character of coastal communities and their inherent value to the nation. I acknowledge that the Commission must take a broad view regarding the diverse uses of the coastal environment and make some judgment on the federal government's role in its stewardship. And, I will focus my remarks on only one of the uses of our coastal resources - recreational fishing. Recreational fishing is a big business. It brings an enormous number of people in contact with the marine environment and produces a high percentage of coastal communities' economy. There are more than 10 million saltwater recreational anglers nationwide. They spend in excess of \$20 billion pursuing their sport. These figures indicate what a tremendously powerful voice marine recreational anglers have and the impact that fishing-related regulations have on those consumers and the industries and communities that support them.

Not only is fishing good for recreation and the economy, it fosters a deep altruistic appreciation for our natural resources. Nearly nine out of ten Americans say

outdoor recreation benefits the environment because it gives people a reason to care about our natural resources. Further, according to the American Sportfishing Association, many Americans see outdoor recreation as one of the main reasons to protect the environment. And, recreational fishing hinges on one simple thing - fish.

In those places where fisheries are abundant, there are significant coastal communities dependent on recreational fishing. In those places where the resource has been overfished or closed to recreational fishing, the coastal communities decline.

Although your charter is directed specifically at federal activities, you should be aware that the fisheries management system is layered. We have international management of highly migratory species such as tuna and marlin, federal management of offshore fisheries such as mahi mahi and wahoo, and state management of inshore species such as flounder and red drum. Many of these fisheries cross boundaries, so there are regional management bodies like the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission to coordinate interjurisdictional management.

The colleague of management systems has met with varying degrees of success over the years, and it would be easy to list the many examples of when and where our federal fisheries management system has failed. But I do not want to waste the Commission's time recounting these negatives. Rather, maybe by examining the places where our system has succeeded, we can gain insight into what parts of this complex management system work for the fish and the fishermen.

Ironically, I believe the answer is found in simplicity. Although the tasks of the Commission and our fisheries managers are not easy or simple, any opportunity we have to simplify them must be exploited. But, where is simplicity in the web of fisheries management? It is found at the lowest possible levels of management - the states. This is where the shining examples of achieving the balance between management and utilization are found.

It has become a familiar story, but let's look at the continuing recovery of Atlantic striped bass as an example. Prior to the 1984 Striped Bass Conservation Act, stocks were so depressed that anglers began to ignore our nation's current most popular marine sport fish. Bass stocks declined as much as 75% from the early 1970s to 1980s. And, it was recreational anglers and state directors who led the charge for better management. By 1996, the value of striped bass landings was at the highest level since 1975, and the recreational fishery and its dramatic economic impact was flourishing. Currently, the Atlantic State Marine Fisheries Commission is working with user groups, state directors and other interests to further define the management of the fishery to reflect a more accurate historic age and size distribution of Atlantic striped bass. This fishery is being rebuilt from the bottom up due in large part to state manager and recreational angler input and dedication to the goal of rebuilding. And as the fishery has recovered, the fishermen have returned, and now we are beginning to see the signs of a healthy fishery.

Gulf red drum were put on the road to recovery from near extinction by initiatives founded and implemented in state management. The same path is emerging here in South Carolina. Through the work of concerned conservationists, our state natural resources department and state legislature, we are laying the groundwork to properly manage our red drum or spot tail stocks.

We already have so many tools for insight into and management of our fisheries on the state and multi-state levels, we just need to utilize them more in the federal process. Maybe we do not need to reinvent the system, but rather refocus it.

CCA has based many of the management decisions it has made on a simple principle - Fisheries management is most effective if it is done at the lowest possible level of government. Big, sweeping, national, one-size-fits-all solutions don't work in fisheries management because they cannot balance the impact of user groups while still doing what is best for the health of the resource.

My final point centers on of these one-size-fits-all solutions that has emerged as one of most high profile management tools – no fishing zones. These broad brush and often-arbitrary closures to recreational fishing are a further sign of the misfocus of our management system. The broader picture is that our management system is not accomplishing what it is mandated to do in the time frame required and these access closures are a knee-jerk attempt to get the process back on line. Some of this is possibly a misperception that management can restore fisheries overnight. They were not destroyed in a day and, logically, cannot be fixed in one either. But, again, the success stories have historically come from state-based management and the active involvement of recreational anglers, not purely from federal management.

As has been shown in recent meetings of Gulf, Atlantic and Pacific regional councils, our system is begging for broadbrush, desperation management that is the antithesis of what has been shown to work. These no-fishing zones are essentially high-level management measures that call for the exclusion of recreational anglers. And if the ocean is so degraded that it needs to have a 20- or 25-percent closure to all fishing, shouldn't we look first at the system that got it to that state, ironically, the same system that is now calling for some of these closures. Although CCA and the majority of the recreational fishing community have supported the use of time and area closures to protect specific species regarding specific conservation concerns, no-fishing zones represent management at the highest level of removal from what traditionally works in balancing management and utilization and, thus, reaching that elusive goal of proper stewardship that I previously alluded to.

All management measures must focus on sound conservation of the resource. The management system must act as a steward to the resource. It should regulate on the health of the resource first and allocation second, while not arbitrarily excluding one of the resources greatest advocates – recreational anglers.

Fisheries management should, thus, be aimed at specific problems and have clear conservation objectives. We must establish a conservation ethic not only in the user groups, but also in the administrators and managers of the resource. We cannot wait for the system to fail and require draconian measures to resurrect what was destroyed. If history tells us anything, it is that our fisheries management losses outnumber our victories. But, that is the result of a system that has been anchored in the tenet of utilization first, with conservation to clean up. In this Commission's quest to establish a comprehensive national ocean policy, I ask this group to closely examine the system that has managed our fisheries, not with an eye toward condemning it but rather refocusing it where it is most effective - at the lowest and simplest level.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you. I applaud the Commission for its broad appeal for input and efforts to improve our U.S. Ocean policy.