

WELCOME TO BILL'S CORNER!

February, 2006 | ([archive](#))

Dear Constituents,

I'd like to announce our new proposal to help the U.S. fishing industry set up seafood marketing councils. These councils would provide a way to educate consumers about the human health aspects of eating fish, the importance of sustainable fishing, and the value of premium fish products. NOAA would provide oversight of the councils to ensure that marketing campaigns reflect and promote sustainable fishing practices and are based on accurate and truthful claims, backed by credible science.

Seafood marketing councils would not result in increased fishing pressure on stocks that are overcapitalized, nor would they have influence over fishery management decisions. The goal is to use current and credible science to market seafood products based on sustainability of the fishery, health benefits, quality controls and guarantees of safety, among other factors.

NOAA has authority to aid in the development of marketing councils under the Fish and Seafood Promotion Act of 1986, but have lacked the regulations to implement. The proposed rule, if finalized, will allow us to move forward. The agency would create the organizational framework and operational guidelines, and would ultimately approve or disapprove the formation of a council. Industry would design and fund the councils, which would have to pass a referendum vote and be subject to analyses and public comment before being approved and established. Participation would be voluntary.

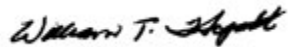
This is a good time for the government to rally in support of the domestic seafood industry. The U.S. industry has expensive overhead costs and is struggling to find equal footing to compete in the domestic marketplace. If we don't do something soon, the industry will lose its infrastructure to coastal development and could disappear forever.

The U.S. seafood trade deficit has soared to \$8 billion, with nearly 80 percent of the seafood Americans eat coming from imports. Marketing councils could help close the trade gap by expanding foreign markets and setting up niche markets in the U.S. The recent Gulf hurricanes dealt a harsh blow to some harvesting sectors, such as the commercial shrimp fleet – which had already lost a large percentage of its domestic market share to low priced imports. The industry is struggling to rebound in the marketplace, even though extensive government and state testing of seafood and water in the Gulf has found there to be no health threats.

This proposal is one of my 10 goals as leader of NOAA Fisheries Service, to promote seafood and support the U.S. fishing industry, which provides significant employment in coastal communities. It also meets the goals outlined in the President's U.S. Ocean Action Plan to promote ocean stewardship and conservation through an informed public.

Marketing councils would help consumers make informed purchasing decisions at the seafood counter. Consumers have so many different options when it comes to seafood, and these councils will help distinguish between differences in price and quality. This proposal is a 3-way win for consumers, industry and the environment. The commercial fishing fleet is among the most regulated industries in the United States, and the American fleet operates under the most stringent environmental laws governing commercial fishing internationally. Over the past decade, the industry has seen major fishing cutbacks to allow overfished species to rebuild to sustainable levels. The United States also has some of the world's strictest fishing laws to protect marine mammals and sea turtles.

I encourage you to provide feedback on this proposal. The comment period ends February 23, 2006. Written comments may be submitted by e-mail to: SMCcomments@noaa.gov (in the subject line type, "comments on the proposed rule for seafood marketing councils") or by postal mail to: Gordon J. Helm, acting director, Office of Constituent Services, Room 9553, SSMC3, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910 or by FAX to: 301-713-2384.



Bill Hogarth
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References

[Federal Register Notice of the Proposal](#)
[Fact Sheet](#)