

**Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee
International Game Fish Association, Dania Beach, Florida
March 3, 2006**

**Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Conservation & Management Act
Reauthorization Recommendations**

Overfishing & Rebuilding Standards

The Committee supports the Administration's emphasis on ending overfishing at the front end of a rebuilding plan, recognizing that the hard deadline of two years, as proposed, may require significant action in some fisheries and is of particular concern in New England.

In strengthening the overfishing and rebuilding provisions, the Administration should take into consideration the following:

- Environmental conditions and ecosystem considerations, including interactions between stocks and predator-prey relationships.
- Recognize monitoring bycatch is a critical component to end overfishing and requirements for bycatch data collection should be strengthened.
- Review the management strategies of fishery management councils that have maintained healthy fish stocks and/or successfully ended overfishing and implemented rebuilding programs, while recognizing the need for flexibility in the strategic options available for addressing issues unique to each region.

Dedicated Access Privileges

The Committee strongly supports greater use of market based approaches to improve management efficiency, promote safety at sea, increase profitability for fishermen and fishing communities, and provide greater incentive for investment in long term conservation of fish stocks.

The Committee supports efforts to protect historical participants (fishermen,) ensure continued opportunity for small operators and provide mechanisms for new entrants into the fishery.

Dedicated Access Privilege systems should include the following:

Allow for fees to cover the direct new cost of administration of the program. These costs should not include general science and assessment costs inherent in the management of any fishery. Consider condition of the fishery in assessing costs.

Emphasize allocation of shares that assign privileges over longer time periods and that utilize percentage shares of a TAC (or other catch limits) rather than absolute amounts to invest individual fishermen in longer term stock maintenance or growth.

Minimize barriers to implementation of DAP systems. Referenda and petition processes should not be included in the law.

Allow full open market participation providing management goals are not compromised.

Enforcement

The Committee supports provisions for sharing VMS data with Homeland Security agencies and with partner state fishery management agencies.

The Committee endorses public funding to support the maintenance and development of VMS systems, particularly in support of homeland security efforts.

The Committee supports increased penalties for willful, egregious violations as articulated in the Administration bill.

Ecosystem Based Management

The Committee endorses greater use of ecosystem based considerations in the management process.

The Committee specifically endorses and encourages the use of ecosystem based considerations in determining appropriate recovery levels for depleted stocks and in balancing multi species management concerns in setting target levels for individual species. Shifts in environmental quality may constrain the ability to achieve historic abundances. Additionally, multi species prioritization decisions may require compromise on target levels for some species in favor of others.

Recreational Saltwater Fishing Data Collection

The Committee is very supportive of establishing a saltwater angler registration program as a key component of the larger recreational fisheries data collection program.

The Committee recognizes states are in a superior position to collect information on the saltwater angling activities occurring in federal waters along their coastlines. As such, the Committee strongly encourages NOAA to work with the states, state Commissions and the larger community of recreational fishing interests to help define the scientific criteria and develop an implementation strategy.

Recognizing state data collection programs are unique from state to state, the Committee encourages avoiding requirements that are too prescriptive and to maintain flexibility while at the same time requiring participation from all coastal states in a data collection program on saltwater angler activities in federal waters off their coastlines.

Council Operations and Peer Review of Science

The Committee supports general provisions contained in the Senate bill to improve Council operations, including operations of scientific and statistical committees and enhanced Council training. (Note: Care should be taken to ensure that academic institution participation should not be hindered by stipend language.)

Requirements to set annual TAC's for *all* species should not be included in the law. However, TAC's should be the norm, with specific exceptions based on specific criteria to be articulated under agency guidelines.

The Committee supports provisions that would require the Secretary and each Council to formalize a peer review process for scientific information.

Council Membership

The Committee is supportive of balanced representation and participation by involved interests and stakeholders.

Regulatory Streamlining

The Committee supports improvements and streamlining without compromising substantive benefits of the reviews.

The process must continue to be an inherently public process.

Cooperative Research

The Committee expresses support for Cooperative Research as articulated in the Senate bill (section 204), requiring the Secretary to establish a regional program.