



United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0905

February 23, 2010

The Honorable John Rockefeller
Chairman
Senate Commerce Committee
508 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kay Hutchison
Ranking Member
Senate Commerce Committee
508 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Rockefeller and Ranking Member Hutchison:

Over the last several months federal officials have closed or limited access to a number of fisheries because of a mandate to end overfishing by 2010.

Coupled with high fuel prices and a weakened economy, these fishing bans are having a devastating effect on commercial, recreational and charter fishermen and their coastal communities. While Florida has been hit particularly hard, it's far from the only state that is enduring a sea of regulatory closures. What's troubling is too often these closures are based on limited data and sporadic stock assessments.

Fishery closures and restrictions are affecting coastal communities all over the United States. Fisheries for South Atlantic red snapper, greater Amberjack in the Gulf of Mexico, the Northeastern black sea bass, the Pacific Ocean perch, the Atka mackerel, summer flounder, and butterfish are all either closed or at risk of closure.

While I strongly support curbs to overfishing and responsible management of our fisheries, I believe we must examine how to achieve that laudable goal without unduly harming coastal communities. That's why I'm requesting the Commerce Committee conduct an oversight hearing on the implementation of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act as soon as possible.

Among the issues the Committee should examine include: whether federal officials are using the best available scientific data to make fishery management decisions, what resources are needed for reliable fishery data, and how to provide economic assistance to fishing communities.

Meantime, I intend to file legislation soon to address some of the problems facing Florida fishermen.

Thank you for your consideration of this request and I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

Bill Nelson