

Field hearing on MSA reauthorization, August 23rd

Sen. Sullivan, Chairman of the US Senate Commerce Committee's Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries and Coast Guard, held a field hearing on MSA reauthorization in Soldotna, Alaska on August 23rd.

No other members of the Subcommittee or their staff attended, however the hearing was broadcast and written testimonies of the three different panels are posted here. <https://www.commerce.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/hearings?ID=B41AA74D-2FE6-4945-AAFF-4B43AD0ACCF7>

The panelists were primarily from Alaska, but each panel also included individuals from other parts of the country who represented the recreational fishing sector.

This is a general summary of the hearing topics discussed and does not reflect all the issues raised by panel members.

While the focus of the hearing was on the MSA, most all of the panelists also commented on the need for maintaining funding for surveys and stock assessments, research, fisheries dependent data collection, and catch reporting in recreational fisheries; and especially the need for supplemental funding for the North Pacific Observer Program and to increase coverage levels and adequately incorporate EM into the program.

Many of the panelists also stated that the MSA is working very well and does not require significant changes. Many of the Alaska panelists focused in particular on maintaining sound science that is foundational to conservation and management and ACLs, AMs, and stock assessments, cautioning against changes that would undermine them.

The recreational sector representatives stated support for conservation and management, but also a desire for greater changes to the MSA believing that it is designed primarily for the commercial sector and does not address the unique management challenges for the recreational sector. In particular, they stated a desire for greater flexibility in ACLs and AMs, the use of alternative data sources in management, increased funding for data collection and stock assessment, and a greater recognition of the economic output of the recreational sector. They support a bill titled Modernizing Recreational Fisheries Management Act that was submitted by Sen. Wicker of Mississippi.

Several Alaska panelists also highlighted the need for changes and clarifications to sections in the MSA related to community protections, and the challenges that the next generation has entering the fisheries. Other topics raised were related to State of Alaska interests and interactions with federal fisheries, the importance of tribal and subsistence representation, and the CDQ program.