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**Just do it!**

Nils E. Stolpe  
FishNet USA  
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If federal fisheries management policy isn't drastically altered, for a far too large part of the industry all that's in it is economic oblivion for you, your boat and your business.

If you participate in, are associated with or dependent upon any kind of fishing and you think that things are moving in the right direction, you're either not in the United States, you're a fisheries manager, you work for an anti-fishing ENGO, or you're not looking much beyond your own self-interest. It's as simple as that.

Fishing in the United States has evolved over generations, supported by centuries-old traditions and close-knit fishing communities. All of this evolution, all of these traditions and our unique and irreplaceable communities are being threatened by a federal fisheries management regime that is based on nothing more than reducing the number of fishermen and the number of fish that they are catching, reducing the areas in which they can fish, and reducing the administrative burden on the government in the most expeditious way possible. This isn't a policy that has been endorsed by Congress, this isn't a policy that reflects the will of the people and it certainly isn't a policy that is supported by a significant proportion of the fishing industry. It is nothing more than the culmination of a carefully orchestrated decades-long campaign by a highly influential group of anti-fishing ENGOs and the multi-billion dollar foundations that support them that has infiltrated its way into the highest offices of the federal oceans bureaucracy.

All of this in spite of the fact that our domestic fisheries are in better shape today than they have been in decades (Steve Murawski, who retired from his position as the chief scientist for NOAA Fisheries last week, said unequivocally that as of this year overfishing in U.S. fisheries is over – see [http://www.nola.com/business/index.ssf/2011/01/overfishing\\_has\\_ended\\_top\\_us\\_s.html](http://www.nola.com/business/index.ssf/2011/01/overfishing_has_ended_top_us_s.html)).

Why do we have more fish today than we've had in several generations? Certainly not because of anything that any so-called environmentalist has done using foundation funding and carrying out agendas which have little to do with fish or fishing. The only reason we have more fish is because you and your fellow fishermen have taken sustainability seriously and have made the necessary sacrifices. Now that we're over the hump, do you want to have a say in decisions that directly affect your business, your family, your community and your future? Do you want to have a say in how our nation's extensive marine resources are sustainably managed? Are you tired of agenda-driven top-down decisions made by people who at best care not a whit for and at worst are openly antagonistic towards fishermen and fishing?

If you answered yes to any or all of these questions, then try one more. Have you done anything substantive about it?

The chances are pretty good that you haven't. And if you don't, the chances are pretty good that the same people and the same organizations backed by the same big money interests will continue to be in charge, will continue to call the shots, and will continue to successfully push their anti-fishing agenda.

But what, I hope you're asking, can I do against multi-billion dollar foundations using their tremendous power to institute policies that protect the fish and ignore the fishermen, against the ENGOs with annual budgets of tens or hundreds of millions of dollars that those foundations support, against the scientists they've bought and the bureaucrats they've put in place?

You've got a voice. Learn how to use it, and use it effectively. Here's your chance to get involved, and to get involved in an issue that should be critical to every commercial, recreational and party/charter fisherman that values fishing sustainably however and whenever he or she wishes (and this isn't a plug for unregulated fishing – thankfully we outgrew that decades ago).

Massachusetts Congressman Barney Franks is on the record with “we will introduce amendments to the Magnuson Act so that we can continue rebuilding fish stocks without causing undue economic harm.” For those of you who aren't familiar with this issue, most – but surely not all - of the problems facing fishermen today revolve around the Magnuson Act requirement that all fish stocks be “rebuilt” to maximum and often unrealistic levels within a specific time period (generally 10 years). Regardless of how steadily a stock of fish is growing, if it doesn't reach a certain level by a certain date, the managers will severely cut back or even eliminate fishing on it until it is “recovered.” This is regardless of the economic damage that will be visited on the people, the businesses and the communities that depend on that fishery. Businesses can be and have been driven into bankruptcy, homes and boats can be and have been lost, futures can be and have been eroded and entire communities can be and are in the process of being destroyed because instead of reaching some arbitrary level of abundance this year, a population of fish is on schedule to reach it next year or the year after.

Why? Because the anti-fishing activists who are now dictating federal fishing policy have used their foundation-supplied \$millions to convince our elected leaders in Washington that it's actually good for the fishermen and others who depend on fishing, but that they are too blinded by the necessity to make a living to realize that themselves.

Obviously, such a Magnuson amendment as the one Congressman Frank is offering would be of tremendous benefit for every fisherman and for every business that depends on fishing. Obviously it would be of no harm to the fish stocks – aside from their reaching that arbitrary “rebuilt” level a year or two later (a requirement would be that they had to maintain their rebuilding trajectory). Just as obviously, the anti-fishing

activists would lose one of their most effective weapons in their campaign against fishing, so we can expect some fierce and obscenely well-funded resistance.

That means the Congressman Franks is going to need some significant support from other coastal legislators, and you are among the folks who can provide him with that support.

If you don't know already, find out who represents you in Washington (the easy to use House and Senate Member locator websites are at <https://writerep.house.gov/writerep/welcome.shtml> and [http://www.senate.gov/general/contact\\_information/senators\\_cfm.cfm](http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm)), call their district or DC offices and find out who on their staff works on environmental or fisheries issues. Talk to them, let them know where you live and vote, what your connection to fishing is, and then explain how important it is to you and to other constituents to amend the Magnuson Act to allow some flexibility in the rebuilding schedules. Do that three times; once for your Representative in the House and once for each of your Senators. And then get as many of your friends, neighbors, relatives and business connections to do the same thing.

This year is going to be a great one for talking to the officials you and your neighbors elect about maintaining jobs. Don't pass up the chance, and remember that the so-called conservationists can only talk about speculative jobs that some people might have at some point in the future while you'll be talking about actual income generating jobs employing actual flesh and blood voters right now. You'll have far more credibility than the foundation flacks hiding behind pumped-up membership rosters and virtually meaningless "click here to save the fish" website responses.

That's the way legislation is supposed to happen and the election in November showed that that's the way it can happen. It has the interest of every elected official in Washington, at least every one who wants to be reelected. But it's only going to happen that way if you make it. You can communicate directly and effectively with your Washington reps on a real world basis. The only way the anti-fishing activists can is through what ifs and speculation. That doesn't generate productive jobs, that doesn't generate real income and that doesn't sustain real communities.

But don't let it end there.

Right now there are more writers putting out well researched articles about what the antis are doing to fishing and to fishermen than there has ever been, and each year an increasing number of scientists with impeccable credentials are publishing articles that put the lie to what the anti-fishing forces are presenting as gospel. Keep your eyes open for any that seem particularly important to you. There are a number of free "clipping services" for fishermen. Saving Seafood keeps people who subscribe to its alerts and visit its website up-to-date on fisheries issues, particularly in the Northeast (<http://savingseafood.com>). On the West Coast, Pacific Fishing provides a similar service through its website and emailed Fish Wrap News (<http://www.pacificfishing.com/>). And there are many other sources, including newsletters from fishing associations, fishing

trade publications, government services and just plain old web searching. Get familiar with what's available and use it.

Make the investment in staying current with what's going on in fisheries locally, regionally, nationally and internationally and when an issue sparks your interest, call up the staffer you now have a relationship with and discuss it. When you read an article that you think he or she should see, send it along (but use judgment here. Congressional staffers tend to be very busy people).

We have a Congress with Members who are almost overwhelmingly ignorant of fish and of fishing. They aren't going to learn anything – at least anything that you are going to want them to learn – from either the leadership of NOAA/NMFS or from ENGOs that have bloated their treasuries and their leaders' salaries by selling out to the highest agenda-driven foundation bidder. Their education depends on you, and on anyone else who you can convince. If they don't start to get federal legislation right when it comes to fishing, you'll have nobody to blame but yourself.

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Note: The New Bedford Harbor Development Commission *"has developed a 'top ten' list of issues as a press briefing to inform journalists, talk show hosts, and other newcomers to the issues facing the New England fishing industry."* While presented as issues facing New England, in some form or another, virtually all ten of them apply to fishermen and fishing anywhere in the United States. The list, along with links to supporting material, is on the Saving Seafood website at <http://www.savingseafood.org/state-and-local/pressing-challenges-facing-the-commercial-fishing-ind-3.html>. Particularly if it serves as a starting point, this list should be an invaluable tool in challenging the anti-fishing management *status quo* that is being used to curtail fishing, drive fishermen off the water, and bankrupt fishing dependent businesses from Alaska to Maine (including Hawaii and the island complexes that are under US jurisdiction).