

Bipartisan bill to address climate impacts on fish



by Capt. David Monti

Hats off to United States Congressmen **Jared Huffman** (D-San Rafael), Chair of the Water, Oceans, and Wildlife Subcommittee, and **Ed Case** (D-Honolulu), subcommittee member. Last month the Congressmen introduced a discussion draft of a bill to reauthorize the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA), the primary fishing law of this nation, that



Huffman

addresses climate change impacts on fishing as well as other important fisheries conservation issues.



Case

As a charter captain and recreational fisherman I know that the Magnuson-Stevens Act has served us well to rebuild fish stocks, however, with climate change impacts, warming water and fish stock movements the fish I catch today are different in type and abundance than the fish I caught ten years ago. The fishing laws of this national need to be reauthorized to provide management and fishers with the tools they need to address stock shifts, habitat degradation due to rising water and a host of other climate change impacts.

Cold water fish in our region such as winter flounder, American lobster and cod have left for colder deeper water north and further offshore. Yet warmer water fish stocks have moved up the coast such as black sea bass, scup and summer flounder in greater abundance.

This draft reauthorization bill is the culmination of a year-long listening tour Rep. Huffman led to get feedback on the legislation – part of Congressman’s effort to foster a uniquely transparent, inclusive, science-based approach to updating this important law governing fisheries in American waters.

“This draft includes important and timely updates to the MSA as well as provisions to strengthen communities and support those whose lives and livelihoods depend on healthy oceans and fisheries,” said Reps. Huffman and Case. “With the growing impacts of climate change, difficulties due to the ongoing pandemic, and rapidly evolving needs in fisheries management and science, amending and reauthorizing the MSA remains a top priority. We’re looking forward to the next phase of this process and receiving constructive commentary to inform and shape the bill’s introduction next year.”

In an effort to include as many opinions and viewpoints as possible, Rep. Huffman and Rep. Case held eight listening sessions and covered seven management regions on their [nationwide fisheries listening tour](#). They heard from 80 different experts and stakeholders, in addition to public comments from dozens of members of the public in person and online. I was one of the 80 people that testified nationally at congressional hearings held by Congressman Huffman’s subcommittee.

A copy of the nearly 200 page MSA reauthorization discussion draft and a link to a bill summary can be found on Congressman Huffman’s website at <https://huffman.house.gov>

Circle hooks (from page 1)

Capt. Dave Monti said, “As a formality, the new regulation was brought before the R.I. Marine Fisheries Council on December 7. They voted to approve recommending the circle hook regulation to DEM Director Janet Coit so that Rhode Island regulations are in compliance with coastwide regulations.”

The new circle hook requirement includes, but is not limited to, such angling techniques as live lining or fishing with chucks of Atlantic menhaden, tube and worm, fishing with eels, eel skin rigs, as well as the addition of pork rind, or squid to a bucktail jig and all other scenarios where a natural bait is added to an artificial lure when targeting striped bass.



The recreational angling community was for the most part in support of more restrictive striped bass regulations to rebuild the stock as quickly as possible. A reduction from a two fish to a one fishing limit occurred and last year a slot limit was established... one fish more than 28" and less than 35".

However, the circle hook regulation applying to tube and worm fishing took many anglers by surprise as fish caught by this mode are usually hooked in the mouth, particularly when the bait is moving through the water when trolling. The fish generally hooks itself on the mouth as the bass hits the bait on the run with little time to swallow it before it is hooked.

Anglers coastwide believe striped bass hook themselves in the mouth when trolling with tube & worm, they do not hook themselves in the gut or throat so release mortality is reduced when using this method.



Ed Langon, a former Rhode Island resident now living in California, caught this striped bass using a tube and worm rig. Circle hooks may now be required to be used on the rig unless anglers are able to convince regulators to consider an exemption.

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) would have to approve a change in the Fisheries Management Plan to change the law and then states would have to amend their regulations. The ASMFC winter meeting is scheduled for February 4-6.

At press time members of fishing organizations throughout Massachusetts, Rhode Island and other New England coastal states planned to petition the ASMFC asking them to adopt a circle hook provision exemption for tube & worm rigs.