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Ocean Conservation Leaders Mark 50 Years of Fishing Law, Warn Against Rollbacks

On the 50th Anniversary of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, leading conservation organizations reflect on five decades of rebuilding fisheries to support coastal economies, and sustain a healthy ocean

Washington, D.C. April 13, 2026 — Today marks the 50th anniversary of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), the nation’s bedrock law that governs fishing in U.S. ocean waters, balancing conservation needs with economic opportunity. When the law was enacted in 1976, many of America’s fisheries were in decline. Overfishing had reduced many fish populations to dangerously low levels, placing coastal economies and the delicate balance of marine life at risk.

The law guided the recovery and sustainability of U.S. fisheries over time, and today they support more than 2 million jobs and contribute over \$300 billion annually to the U.S. economy. These fisheries underpin coastal economies across the country—from the Pacific Islands to the Gulf Coast—while supporting domestic seafood production and fishing traditions coast to coast.

“Healthy and abundant fisheries don’t happen by accident. For fifty years, the Magnuson-Stevens Act has been a powerful tool to curb overfishing and sustain fish populations, but modern challenges are pushing fisheries to their limits. More than 40 fish stocks remain overfished, including several that had previously rebounded but are now declining again. Long-standing management issues, paired with recent actions to gut NOAA and rollback science-based protections, are making it even harder to keep our fisheries abundant for the health of coastal economies and the ocean.

“By building on what has worked over the past 50 years, and avoiding steps that would weaken the MSA, we can ensure America’s fisheries continue to support jobs, communities, and a healthy ocean for generations to come.”

About the Groups:

The five ocean conservation organizations include: Natural Resources Defense Council, Ocean Conservancy, Oceana, Environmental Defense Fund, and Conservation Law Foundation. These groups have worked closely together for over a decade to protect and advance conservation gains in U.S. marine fisheries policy and management.

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