

Thursday, Apr. 10 2008

Opportunity for Bush Administration to Enhance its Ocean Legacy Threatened by Shortsighted Interests

PR Newswire
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WASHINGTON, April 10, 2008 /PRNewswire-USNewswire via COMTEX/ -- New proposals could set historic rules for managing wild fish populations

Ocean luminaries and fisheries experts today recognized the Bush administration for its efforts to end overfishing and preserve ecologically significant areas of the ocean. They also urged the administration to stand up to powerful fishing interests that could jeopardize recent successes in ocean policy.

"During his final months in office, President Bush has the opportunity to enhance his ocean legacy," said Dr. Joshua Reichert, managing director of the Pew Environment Group. "The administration must stand firm against attempts by those in the fishing industry and on some of the nation's fishery management councils to undermine its significant achievements for marine conservation."

In 2006 President Bush created the Northwest Hawaiian Islands National Monument, the largest single area dedicated to conservation in U.S. history, and in 2007 signed legislation strengthening the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (**MSA**), our nation's primary ocean fish conservation law.

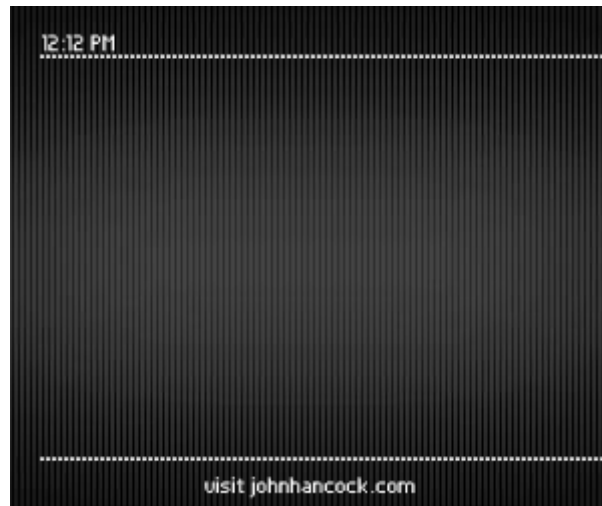
To implement the new MSA law, the National Marine Fisheries Service (**NMFS**) is expected to publish two proposals in the coming months. These rulemakings - one on compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (**NEPA**), the other aimed at ending overfishing - could either protect fish populations from overfishing or bring them one step closer to the brink of collapse.

"Healthy, diverse ocean ecosystems can better withstand changes in climate or water temperature. We need to develop policies with an eye toward the entire ecosystem, not just the few fish species we'd like to catch," said Dr. Sylvia Earle, explorer-in-residence at the National Geographic Society.

"We are taking more fish out of the oceans than the oceans can sustainably replenish," said Philippe Cousteau, founder and CEO of EarthEcho International. "We should use sound science to set sustainable limits on the amount of fish we catch."

For NMFS' regulations to fully comply with NEPA, the rulemaking - which is more than eight months overdue - must compare a range of alternatives and possible consequences to proposed fishery management actions, allow adequate public participation in fishery management decisions and include procedures to evaluate the wider ecosystem impacts of fishing decisions on ocean ecosystems.

To end overfishing by 2011, the proposed rule needs to be published soon and must require that annual catch limits (ACLs) end overfishing, are based on the best available science, hold fishery managers accountable for allowing ACLs to be exceeded to prevent chronic overfishing and facilitate ecosystem-based fishery management.



"My experience in Hawaii has shown me that the fishery management councils usually focus on solving short-term economic problems, but end up creating long-term conservation crises," said William Aila, Hawaiian fisherman. "The councils need strict guidance from the National Marine Fisheries Service to make sure they do what's right in the long term."

"Consumers and chefs have an important role to play in promoting sustainably caught seafood," said Barton Seaver, executive chef and partner of Hook restaurant in Washington, D.C. "But we need government to step in and create policies that protect our oceans and the fishing communities which rely upon its resources so that we can have seafood on our plates and enough fish left in the oceans."

For more information, including fact sheets on overfishing and the National Environmental Policy Act, visit http://www.pewtrusts.org/our_work.aspx?category=146

To listen to an MP3 of a fisheries press briefing, go to http://www.pewtrusts.org/news_room_ektid37348.aspx

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