

Opening Statement
The Honorable Madeleine Z. Bordallo
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife
Tuesday, October 27, 2009
Implementation of the Magnuson-Steven Fishery
Conservation and Management Act

Today the Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife meets to hear testimony on the progress being made by the National Marine Fisheries Service and the Regional Fishery Management Councils in setting annual catch limits and accountability measures to end overfishing and rebuild overfished fish stocks, as required by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

This hearing will explore how Annual Catch Limits—or ACLs -- are set, efforts to improve the type and quality of information that informs management decisions, and successes and challenges in implementing ACLs and accountability measures.

In 1996, after witnessing the decline of important fisheries around the country, Congress first required the Councils to end overfishing and rebuild stocks that had been fished to perilously low levels.

While the Councils implemented numerous rebuilding plans, overfishing continued in many fisheries. In response, the Magnuson-Stevens Reauthorization Act of 2006 went a step further and required that fishery management plans adopt ACLs for stocks subject to overfishing.

According to the Senate report on the legislation, requiring ACLs was intended not only to prevent overfishing from occurring, but also to drive improvements in fishery data collection and research to develop a more precise assessment of the amount of fish that can be caught. The Act also included specific provisions to strengthen the role of science in fishery management decision making. Such improvements were intended to aid in implementing ACLs and accountability measures.

The 2006 amendments brought important advances toward recovering the health of our nation's fisheries, and we will continue to support the implementation of those provisions. That said, the National Marine Fisheries Service and the Councils have challenges to meet as they work to meet the statutory deadlines and we welcome constructive suggestions for assisting them in their efforts to ensure the requirements are achieved in a timely fashion.

I think it's very important that we are holding this hearing today. It's better to discuss and seek solutions to the challenges involved in fully implementing the law now, than to have to return several years from now when these vital resources are further depleted to try and answer the question of why Congress did not do enough to ensure that overfishing was brought to an end.