

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF
DAVID LITTLE
PRESIDENT
CLIPPER SEAFOODS, LTD
HEARING ON
HR 3910
LONGLINE CATCHER PROCESSOR
SUBSECTOR SINGLE FISHERY COOPERATIVE ACT**

**BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INSULAR AFFAIRS, OCEANS AND WILDLIFE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
July 27, 2010**

Madam Chairwoman and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to appear before you today. My name is Dave Little and I am the President of Clipper Seafoods LTD. Our company was founded in 1987 and was one of the first U. S. companies to harvest Pacific cod on board a freezer longline vessel. I also serve as President of the Freezer Longline Coalition, which represents the owners of all 34 active vessels in the Bering sea Pacific cod fishery. The North Pacific freezer longline fleet employs around one thousand fishermen and contributes over \$300 million annually to the U. S. economy. Our members are united in their desire to fish cooperatively and in their commitment to sustainable fishing practices.

I am here today to strongly support enactment of H.R. 3910, the Longline Catcher Processor Subsector Single Fishery Cooperative Act. There is unanimous support within the sector for the formation of a co-op and broad support for this legislation, including the state of Washington, the Environmental Defense Fund, World Wildlife Fund, numerous fisheries associations, and several key financial institutions.

Our vessels are catcher/processors, which means they catch, process, freeze and package fish on board the vessels while at sea. The vessels use specialized longlines deployed on the bottom with baited hooks to catch the resource. Each fish is individually taken off the hook, bleed, processed and flash frozen within a matter of hours. This method of fishing creates a very high quality product which returns the highest value to the nation. Our Coalition is extremely proud of its sustainable and low environmental impact fishing practices and our fishery was the first cod fishery in the world to receive certification from the Marine Stewardship Council.

In recent years as fuel prices have increased and Pacific cod prices have dropped, participants have been forced into an extreme and dangerous race for fish. We refer to this as the "Olympic system," with vessel owners concentrating their efforts on catching and processing the maximum amount of cod in the shortest possible time. Every year captains and crews miss Christmas with their families in order to start the race by midnight on January 1st. They fish around the clock, sometimes without sleep and with no regard for weather, to catch as much as quickly as possible before the race is over. Byproducts of the cod fish (such as heads, stomachs, livers and cheeks) are often discarded along with other by-catch to make room in the hold for more valuable products. I promised to the

fishermen I represent that I would do everything that I can to end this dangerous and wasteful style of management.

Eliminating the race for fish will allow vessel operators to safely slow down with the knowledge that they will still catch their share of the resource. A slower pace will improve safety, allow the crew more time to rest and provide greater job stability by extending the fishery over the entire year. Fishermen will have greater flexibility to maximize the value of their catch, they will increase product yield and quality, and will become even better stewards of the resource.

Fishery cooperatives and other forms of rationalization are not new management concepts. In fact, the freezer longline Pacific cod sector is the only remaining major fishery not yet rationalized in the North Pacific. This cooperative would be similar to other successful BSAI cooperatives currently in place and it will provide most if not more of the same public and private benefits that are already realized in these other rationalized fisheries.

We believe that H.R. 3910 will provide the necessary stability for the long-term health of the freezer longline sector of the Pacific cod fishery. This legislation simply provides the necessary legal authority for those fishing vessels seeking to fish in a cooperative to do so. The formation of the cooperative under this legislation would require the approval of 80% of the eligible members of the sector, and nothing under the proposal would preempt the authority of the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council. We have worked closely with the National Marine Fisheries Service to ensure that this legislation is consistent with the agency's fisheries management practices and goals.

This legislation also is consistent with prior Congressional action to address rationalization for this fleet in the North Pacific. In 2004 Congress enacted legislation to authorize a federally sponsored buyback program for catcher processors in the North Pacific to improve sustainability and facilitate rationalization. The freezer longline fleet conducted a successful buyback program and is now seeking to complete the steps for full rationalization.

The legislation does not favor or harm any one individual, vessel or group. The legislation would not reallocate or take fish from any participants in the sector or any other sector. It merely establishes a method to divide the Freezer longline cod quota between those vessels that choose to coop and those that choose not to. This legislation simply allows the fishermen in this sector to work collectively to improve utilization, promote stability, better protect the resource, improve safety and maintain the long-term economic viability of the industry. I respectfully ask the members of the subcommittee to act quickly in passing this legislation to permanently end the race for fish in this fishery.

I would like to thank the members of this committee for the opportunity to testify here today and also thanks to the sub-committee staff for all of the hard work in making this hearing possible. I would like to request that my written statement and background materials on the freezer longline fleet be included as part of the hearing's record.

I would be happy to answer any questions.