

Chairman John Thune Questions for the Record
Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere Nominee Dr. Timothy
Gallaudet

Question 1. There have been calls for increased flexibility in the Magnuson-Stevens Act to better allow fishermen to reach the full fishing potential of the stock without impacting sustainability of the species. Director Oliver and others have indicated that there is the possibility for additional flexibilities in annual catch limits, stock rebuilding plans and accountability measures to enforce annual catch limits. In what parts of the law does NOAA have the greatest need for increased flexibility, and are there any specific stocks or fisheries that require additional flexibility? Do you commit to working with this Committee as we work to amend and reauthorize the Magnuson-Stevens Act?

Response. A strength of the MSA is that it utilizes a bottom up approach where fishermen and stakeholders provide input into a regional management approach that is flexible to determine what approach will be most effective for their fishery. The parts of MSA which has the greatest need for increased flexibility are those which affect fish stocks for which there is limited data and where commercial and recreational usergroups have fundamentally different goals and objectives. Another emerging challenge is for those species that are migrating due to changing environmental factors. Examples include the Red Snapper fishery in the Gulf of Mexico and the Black Sea Bass fishery in the Atlantic .

We also need to improve the regulatory process by which the MSA interacts with other environmental statutes, such as NEPA, ESA and MMPA. I look forward to working with you to find more efficient mechanisms to meet the mandates of these statutes.

If confirmed, I will commit to working with the Committee on developing the most effective legislative approach to increase flexibility in fishery management, a goal that Secretary Ross also supports.

Senator Roger Wicker Questions for the Record
Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere Nominee Dr. Timothy
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Question 1:

You recognize that NOAA's marine observations, mapping, and ocean exploration activities can expand the nation's blue economy. How important is developing and utilizing unmanned systems to improving NOAA's technical capacity?

RDML Gallaudet response: NOAA has already experimented with unmanned systems for ocean sensing, and it will be important for NOAA to use them more in the future to increase its technical capacity at a reduced cost compared to manned systems.

Given your experience, in what ways can you use your role at NOAA to leverage the collaboration between the Navy and other partners to advance the use of unmanned maritime systems? How do you see the role of unmanned systems to meet mission requirements and provide cost effective solutions to taxpayers?

RDML Gallaudet response: NOAA has begun exchanging personnel and information with the Navy to advance its use of unmanned systems. If confirmed, I would continue this collaboration and seek to leverage the Navy's expertise, training, education, and equipment to continue the advancement of unmanned systems at NOAA. The role of unmanned systems at NOAA, as with the Navy and other Federal Agencies, will grow in applications of ocean observation and mapping, as well as atmospheric sensing.

Question 2:

Does the Administration support marine aquaculture? How do you think NOAA can better support growth for the aquaculture industry?

RDML Gallaudet response: The President and Secretary Ross have both publicly expressed their support of increasing aquaculture in the U.S.

NOAA can support the growth of aquaculture in the U.S. by providing data and predictions of ocean conditions to best develop and operate aquaculture facilities.

NOAA can also leverage its experience with Regional Fisheries Councils to assist with permitting, development, and management. We also need to support research to ensure we act prudently to leverage regional scientific and outreach capabilities. We must also streamline regulatory processes related to aquaculture. NMFS has recently entered into a MOU with six other federal agencies related to permitting offshore aquaculture facilities in the Gulf of Mexico. By supporting our sustainable wild-stock harvests and expanding aquaculture production, we can make inroads into the seafood supply deficit.

Question 3:

My bill, S. 1520, the Modernizing Recreational Fisheries Management Act aims to improve fisheries management under the Magnuson-Stevens Act for saltwater recreational fisheries. In your testimony, you expressed a keen interest in "advancing fisheries management under the Magnuson-Stevens Act."

Do you agree that commercial and recreational fishing are fundamentally different enterprises, requiring different approaches to management? If so, how would you work to improve saltwater recreational fishery management?

RDML Gallaudet response: I agree that commercial and recreational fishing are fundamentally different, but both share the common need for science-based management for sustainable access. Different management approaches are not only useful for these different types of fishing, but also for different regions and different fish stocks. Saltwater recreational fishery management can be improved with better data collection and models used for stock assessments. NOAA is already moving in this direction by adding additional flexibility for fishery managers, such as determining rebuilding timelines, as NOAA revised the National Standard 1 Guidelines. Increasing flexibility in the tools used for fishery management would also help, and I echo Secretary Ross's support for including provisions to do this in any future legislation that seeks to improve upon the MSA.

Question 4:

You rightly note in your testimony that NOAA impacts “hundreds of billions of dollars of activity and infrastructure.” After the expansion of the Panama Canal, our port infrastructure needs to respond to the larger container ships to take advantage of the new trade efficiencies.

However, in recent years, ports in my state have been hampered by the lack of timely responses from NOAA, particularly NMFS, in dealing with Section 7 Endangered Species Act permits. Other agencies are ready to allow the permitting process to proceed, but NOAA continues to hold up the process. If confirmed in your role at NOAA, will you work to make sure that our ports can promptly receive the permits they need to expand?

RDML Gallaudet response: If confirmed, I am eager to explore opportunities to improve permitting through the Administration's efforts under Executive Order 13807 to have “One Federal Decision.” Furthermore, I am interested in increasing the efficiency of section 7 consultation process, which ensures actions taken by agencies do not threatened endangered species. These efforts could facilitate the need development of our nation's Maritime Transportation System, and therefore is consistent with the Administration's economic agenda.

Senator Dan Sullivan Questions for the Record
Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere Nominee Dr. Timothy
Gallaudet

Hydrographic Surveying

There is a significant backlog of hydrographic charting nationwide, which can adversely affect maritime commerce and increase the risk of marine casualties. This is a huge problem in Alaska where some areas off our coast have chart data collected back in the 1800s when Russia still owned the territory. There is potential to address this backlog through contracting with the private sector, but there is a need for leadership to make this happen. Chairman Thune and I commissioned a GAO report that recommended that NOAA needs better data and a strategy for expanding private sector data collection for hydrographic surveying. Secretary Ross responded to this report with a statement of actions to be taken by NOAA, with associated dates for execution of the actions.

If confirmed, will you work with me to aggressively reduce this charting backlog using both public and private assets to achieve this goal? Will you track and execute the action items committed to by NOAA as outlined in the statement of actions in response to the GAO report on private sector involvement in hydrographic surveying?

RDML Gallaudet response: If confirmed, I will work with you to reduce this charting backlog using both public and private assets, and I will track and execute the action items committed to NOAA as outlined in the statement of actions in response to the GAO report on private sector involvement in hydrographic surveying. This would support development of our nation's Maritime Transportation System, and therefore is consistent with the Administration's economic agenda.

Alaska Based Staffing

For Alaska, NOAA's missions—managing our nation's fisheries, charting our waters, and providing accurate weather forecasting— are of significant importance. Yet, much of the NOAA staffing and infrastructure for Alaska is located elsewhere. For example, by law one of the survey vessels is homeported in Ketchikan, but it actually resides in Oregon. And, the Alaska Fisheries Science Center is located in Washington State.

If confirmed, will you work with me to ensure NOAA personnel and assets are deployed in a manner that makes sense for both completing the mission and the taxpayers?

RDML Gallaudet research: If confirmed, I will work with you to ensure NOAA personnel and assets are deployed in states and territories in a manner that makes sense for both completing the mission and the taxpayers.

Senator Todd Young Questions for the Record
Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere Nominee Dr. Timothy
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Admiral Gallaudet, NOAA is beginning to reap the benefits of the investments in our country's next generation of weather satellites. Some of these satellites, such as the GOES-R satellite, recently provided amplifying imagery and data as Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria bore down on the Texas, Florida, and Puerto Rico. For longer-term weather forecasting, NOAA and NASA are constructing the Joint Polar Satellite System (JPSS) and the Polar Follow On system (PFO), a combined set of four satellites slated for use in the polar orbit.

With respect to the Polar Follow On program, the acquisition plan in the FY17 budget request stretches out the need dates for JPSS 3 and JPSS 4. On paper, such budgetary shifts can save money in the near term. However, delaying procurement of the third and fourth satellites could prevent the government from realizing cost savings that come from economies of scale. Programs that are stretched out can result in increased total costs, as the price of components increase over time. Will you pledge to work with NOAA leadership to review the acquisition strategy for the Polar Follow On program to ensure Americans are getting the most bang for our government buck?

RDML Gallaudet response: If confirmed, I will pledge to work with NOAA leadership to review the acquisition strategy for the Polar Follow On program to ensure Americans are getting the most bang for our government buck.