

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

October 25, 2022

Janet Coit  
Assistant Administrator  
National Marine Fisheries Service  
1315 East-West Highway  
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Assistant Administrator Coit:

We are writing to urge the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to address the rapid effects of climate change on our valuable domestic fisheries. The *Sustaining America's Fisheries for the Future Act* (H.R. 4690), championed by Representatives Huffman, Case, and Peltola, would update and reauthorize the Magnuson-Stevens Act. This legislation, and the broad stakeholder input that led to it, placed particular emphasis on the need for the law to respond climate change by integrating climate considerations throughout the fisheries management process, addressing the management framework for shifting fish stocks, and jump-starting the production and use of climate-related science and data. As our efforts to update the Magnuson-Stevens Act continue, NMFS can and must use both its existing authorities and new funding opportunities under the Inflation Reduction Act to scale up climate-ready management of our marine fisheries.

From warming water temperatures to ocean acidification, U.S. fisheries are facing significant challenges that affect our ability to produce food and sustain communities. Climate change adds great complexity to the already dynamic and challenging nature of sustainable fishery management, threatening to reverse the important sustainability gains made under the Magnuson-Stevens Act to date.

The agency has made some important progress to advance climate-informed fisheries science under the agency's Climate Science Strategy and corresponding Regional Action Plans. We also appreciate the agency's actions under the Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad to conduct stakeholder outreach to better understand the impacts of the climate crisis on our marine fisheries. However, we are concerned that not enough has been done to implement adaptive management approaches that account for climate impacts on our fisheries, leaving our ecosystems and fishing communities at greater risk of climate-induced disruptions.

We are highly interested in the recent recommendations of the U.S. Government Accountability (GAO) regarding these science-to-management challenges.<sup>1</sup> The GAO report, released on August 18, concludes that Councils have used climate information only to a limited extent in fishery management. Specifically, the GAO found that: NMFS does not regularly collect or share information about actions that fishery managers are taking to enhance the climate resilience of federal fisheries; the agency could better share information across regions; and resource constraints pose challenges to enhancing the climate resilience

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<sup>1</sup> United States Government Accountability Office, "Federal Fisheries Management: Opportunities Exist to Enhance Climate Resilience," August 2022, [https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-22-105132#summary\\_recommend](https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-22-105132#summary_recommend).

of fisheries. A chief GAO recommendation to address the gaps is that NMFS should work with the Councils to “identify, prioritize, and plan to implement opportunities to enhance the climate resilience of federal fisheries.”

We hope you agree that NMFS and the Biden Administration have an opportunity to address this disconnect and accelerate the climate-ready management strategies needed to help fishery managers better understand, prepare for, and adapt to climate-related disruptions and changes. We urge NMFS to take immediate steps to ensure climate-ready management is an enduring priority for U.S. fisheries. The recommendations below include several clear actions the agency can take to help ensure our fisheries are climate-ready and sustainable for the future.

- **Prioritize climate-ready management with explicit climate resilience goals:** With the historic passage of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), Congress has created a bold path forward with innovative emission reduction strategies that promise to deliver a more just and resilient future. The IRA also provides critical funds to accelerate our adaptive approaches, including funds intended to help fisheries and coastal communities adapt to climate impacts. NMFS should respond with a similarly bold and transformative strategy for adapting our fisheries to climate change, making more explicit that climate-ready management is not the same as business-as-usual management. This could be accomplished through a national resilience strategy that ties together existing workstreams and sets clear goals, and/or an agency-wide Administrative Order to operationalize and incentivize the use of climate-ready management approaches across the science centers and regional offices, through to all Council meetings and procedures. Such a climate resilience strategy for fisheries should include, at minimum, the following elements.
- **Recommitting to rebuilding overfished stocks and preventing overfishing:** Ecologists recommend that the most important preparation fishery managers can undertake is to ensure that fisheries are well-managed to promote high levels of biomass and genetic diversity. Given this, we are concerned about recent increases in the number of fish stocks that are overfished or subject to overfishing. Currently, 51 stocks are now overfished (over 20%), and 26 stocks are subject to overfishing, 9 of the 47 federally managed stocks that have been previously rebuilt are once again in need of rebuilding, and rebuilding has stalled since 2019. NMFS can and should assess opportunities to leverage existing authorities for enhancing fishery resilience, including implementing more precautionary management for stocks that have been identified as particularly vulnerable to climate change.
- **Investing in the Climate, Ecosystems, and Fisheries Initiative:** With the funds made available under Title IV of the IRA, NMFS should build and support a full-scale implementation of the Climate, Ecosystem and Fisheries Initiative, developing not only longer-term innovative modeling solutions but also establishing, in the near-term, the decision support tools and management teams that will meet the needs identified by the GAO in helping fishery managers understand and implement management approaches that will increase fishery resilience and adapt to climate impacts.

- **Significantly increase technical guidance and assistance to support implementation of climate-ready approaches:** While a variety of approaches are being tested in various regions, there is no centralized guidance, nor is there a hub of information distribution, best-practices sharing, or technical support for fishermen, regions, and Councils. Even for managers and other actors with a clear interest in climate-ready management, it can be challenging to keep track of the different management approaches that could be taken to adapt the system and increase fishery resilience. This issue was specifically highlighted by the GAO as an opportunity for NMFS to facilitate knowledge-sharing between NMFS and the Councils. NMFS should also provide assistance and incentives to facilitate the incorporation of climate science into the management process.

Thank you for your work and leadership on these issues. We look forward to working with you to explore opportunities within the Magnuson-Stevens Act framework to advance climate-ready fishery management.

Sincerely,



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Jared Huffman  
Member of Congress



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Ed Case  
Member of Congress



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Mary Sattler Peltola  
Member of Congress



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Alan S. Lowenthal  
Member of Congress



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C. A. Dutch Ruppertsberger  
Member of Congress



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Earl Blumenauer  
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*Debbie Dingell*

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*A. Donald McEachin*

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