

14 July, 2011

Dear Member of Congress:

We, the undersigned natural and social scientists, urge you to help protect fish, fishermen and fishing communities by keeping all feasible management options available to allow local fishermen and managers to choose what is best for them and their fisheries. Please help stop any action that would artificially limit the use of catch shares or any other tool and unnecessarily constrain the regionally-based processes that take into account the specific conditions in which each fishery operates.

Our collective experience – reported and analyzed in the scientific literature – shows very clearly that fisheries across the United States have unique biological, ecological, social and economic attributes. Moreover, each fishery has unique goals and challenges, and requires tailored management approaches to achieve those goals. Many of us have worked with the regional fishery management councils to ensure that they use the best available science to choose management approaches. We have seen firsthand the importance of having all tools available to address the wide array of challenges in our fisheries. Arbitrary removal of options from the management toolkit limits the capacity of fishermen, managers and regional councils to select the best approaches, as mandated by law and required for enduring management success.

While in some cases fishery management councils have made an explicit decision not to develop catch shares for some fisheries, most of the councils have worked with fishermen to develop catch shares for at least some fisheries, and a growing fraction of total U.S. landings is managed through catch shares. Proposals that would limit future development, approval or implementation of new catch share programs – even when they are the preferred option of fishermen and managers – would significantly harm the ability of regional councils to meet biological, social and economic goals. Catch share systems can be developed to fit a wide variety of fishery characteristics and management objectives. They should remain with all others in a comprehensive fisheries management toolkit available to local decision makers.

We strongly urge you to maintain the current ability of fishermen, managers, the regional fishery management councils and NOAA to use a full complement of tools in rebuilding and sustaining vibrant fisheries and coastal economies in the United States.

Sincerely,

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