



THE  
**PEW**  
ENVIRONMENT GROUP

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March 30, 2010

The Honorable Alan Mollohan, Chairman  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,  
Science and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Frank Wolf, Ranking  
Member  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,  
Science and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Mollohan and Representative Wolf:

The Pew Environment Group (PEG) appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony on the National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) FY2011 budget request. Specifically, we would like to comment on the fisheries data collection and analysis request of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). In order to meet critical new fisheries management requirements, we request a total of \$380.9 million for data collection and analysis, which is an increase of \$58.4 million over the President's FY2011 budget request.

In 2006, Congress reauthorized and amended the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act to finally put an end to overfishing, i.e., taking fish from the ocean faster than they can reproduce. To achieve that objective, Congress required federal fishery managers to establish science-based annual catch limits (ACLs) that do not allow overfishing for all U.S. ocean fisheries. As these ACLs are developed, it is imperative that Congress appropriate the funding necessary to continue providing and improving the scientific information fisheries managers need to guide decisions that will sustain our fisheries. ACLs must be based on science, not politics, to ending overfishing and rebuild depleted fisheries.

Improvements in data collection and analysis will enable fishery managers to better achieve the goal of the 2006 amendments, ending overfishing. The following core data collection and monitoring programs should be increased by a total of \$58.4 million over the President's FY2011 budget request. This represents an increase of \$35.5 million over FY2010 enacted funding levels, for a total of \$380.9 million. This increase is broken down into specific budget categories below.

Fisheries Research and Management Programs: +11.4 million over the President's request, for a total of \$190.9 million, an amount equal to the FY2010 enacted level. Fisheries research and management programs provide accurate and timely information and analysis on the biology and population status of managed fish as well as the socioeconomics of the fisheries that depend on those populations. Such information is critical for the development of fisheries management measures to ensure that they end overfishing. In NOAA's FY2011 budget request, \$11.4 million is transferred from the Fisheries Research and Management Programs line item into the National Catch Share Program line item. We believe that any increases for catch share programs should be made with new money, not transferred from existing general research programs that should be available for all fisheries. Because of their vital role in ending overfishing, Fisheries Research and Management Programs should be funded at no less than the FY2010 enacted level of \$190.9 million. Additionally, no funds from the line item should be transferred to the National Catch Share Program, because those funds would become permanently unavailable to fund research and management programs for the vast majority of federally managed fisheries that are not currently in a catch share program, and may not be included in one in the future.

Expand Annual Stock Assessments: +10 million over the President's request, for a total of \$61.7 million, an increase of \$10.7 million over the FY2010 enacted level. Stock assessments are the basic scientific tool that scientists use to determine the health of fisheries. A stock assessment provides estimates of population size and the amount of fishing that the population can sustainably support. The President's budget request of \$51.7 million would only provide the capability to assess 57% of the 230 commercially and recreationally important fish stocks managed by the federal government.<sup>1</sup> However, NMFS's goal is to assess all major fish stocks and conduct annual baseline monitoring for all federally-managed fish species.<sup>2</sup> Using funds appropriated under this budget line, NMFS plans to update fish stock assessments, support the implementation of ACLs, support fishery independent surveys, expand fishery dependent sampling, and improve ACL forecasting through enhanced modeling. Increased funding for data collection and monitoring will increase certainty in determining fish population sizes and the amount of fishing these populations can sustain, thus enabling managers to increase fishing opportunities.

Cooperative Research: +10 million over the President's request, for a total of \$17.1 million, a decrease of \$500,000 below the FY2010 enacted level. Cooperative research programs pay

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<sup>1</sup>National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Budget Estimate for Fiscal Year 2010, Exhibit 13, p. 217.

<sup>2</sup> National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, "NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service Requirements for Improved and Integrated Conservation of Fisheries, Protected Resources and Habitat," January 2003.

fishermen, operating under the direction of federal scientists, to collect fisheries data, and test new more sustainable fishing gear and practices. In addition to the information collected, cooperative research programs build partnerships among scientists and fishermen. They are also an effective way to provide financial relief for struggling fishermen, while also creating a more transparent process and providing a cost-effective way to improve the data upon which fisheries management decisions are made.

In 2003, NMFS estimated that it would need \$25.5 million for cooperative research by FY2009.<sup>3</sup> The President's FY2011 budget request transfers \$6 million out of the cooperative research line item and into the National Catch Share Program line item. Although NMFS asserts that the \$6 million will be used for cooperative research in catch share fisheries, there is no guarantee that it will continue to be used for cooperative research in the future. In addition, taking funds from general cooperative research, where it would be available for all fisheries, and restricting it to only catch share fisheries, short changes the vast majority of fisheries that are not catch share fisheries. Moreover, the President's budget request decreases funding for cooperative research an additional \$4.565 million. Therefore, NMFS proposes to cut the cooperative research funding available to all fisheries by \$10.5 million, in other words a 60 percent decrease in funding available to all fisheries from FY2010 enacted levels. We request an increase of \$10 million, for general cooperative research funding available to all fisheries, for a total of \$17.1 million, close to FY2010 enacted levels.

Survey and Monitoring Projects: +6 million over the President's request, for a total of \$30 million, an increase of \$6.2 million over the FY2010 enacted level. NOAA has stated that "many fisheries lack adequate and timely monitoring of catch and fishing effort."<sup>4</sup> Survey and monitoring projects provide critical support for implementation of the new ACL requirement. Increased funding will improve that accuracy of ACLs and will increase the percentage of stocks with assessments. Two of the most important needs overall are research vessel surveys to collect fishery independent information on abundance and distribution of fish populations.<sup>5</sup> Additional funding for fishery-independent surveys, monitoring, and research will improve estimates of ecosystem change, fishing mortality, and population size.

Fisheries Statistics: +11 million over the President's request, for a total of \$32.4 million, an increase of \$11.3 million over the FY2010 enacted level. Given the fact that there are great data collection needs in the south Atlantic, and Gulf of Mexico recreational fisheries, PEG recommends that the entire \$11 million increase go toward the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP), a new saltwater recreational fishing data collection program that is partially included in the Fisheries Statistics line. MRIP funding should total \$20 million, an increase of \$11 million over the FY2010 enacted level of \$9 million. Increased funding will improve data

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<sup>3</sup> *Id.* NMFS 2003 five year assessment estimated the need for cooperative research to be \$22.75 million above FY2003 levels by FY2009, for a total of \$25.50 million.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.* at 166.

<sup>5</sup> Marine Fisheries Stock Assessment Improvement Plan: Report of the National Marine Fisheries Service National Task Force for Improving Fish Stock Assessments. October 2001. NOAA Technical Memorandum NMFS-F/SPO-56.

on recreational fishing catch (both landed and released fish) and participation. One promising new technology is electronic reporting, which could improve the timeliness and accuracy of recreational data. Additional resources could be used to develop and deploy such new systems. Better quality data on marine recreational fishing, which contributes roughly \$80 billion annually to the U.S. economy,<sup>6</sup> will allow scientists to better estimate fishing mortality and set ACLs more accurately, thus reducing the risk of overfishing. In addition, improving the timeliness of recreational data will allow managers to take action before an ACL is exceeded. This will lead to less restrictive management decisions and more fishing opportunities.

Observers/Training: +10 million over the President's request, for a total of \$48.8 million, an increase of \$7.7 million over the FY2010 enacted level. NMFS has been required by law to establish a standardized bycatch (incidental catch of non-target ocean wildlife) reporting system since 1996. Fishery observers (trained biologists who go to sea on commercial fishing vessels) collect close to real-time commercial fishing catch and bycatch data and important information on fishing practices, gear use, where and when fishing occurs, compliance, and biological samples not available from dockside sampling. Observer programs are "often the best means to gather current information on fisheries status" and enable effective management, even though currently only 40 fisheries have observer programs.<sup>7</sup> Additional funding for observer coverage will improve the quality and quantity of fisheries data, especially estimates of bycatch mortality, information that is critical to estimating populations size and sustainable fishing levels.

In 2003, NMFS recommended that the National Observer Program be funded at \$104 million by FY2009. The increased funding would have been used for research and development into innovative fishing gear to reduce bycatch, implementation of bycatch reduction strategies, and implementation of statistically valid observer coverage in all fisheries. Unfortunately, in the President's FY2011 budget request, Observers/Training suffers more than \$3 million in terminations, resulting in a request of \$38.8 million. Increasing that request to \$48.8 million would be a down payment on fully funding the observer program.

### Conclusion

NMFS data indicates that 37 of the 190 assessed commercially and recreationally important fish stocks (about 20 percent) are subject to overfishing. It is essential to increase funding to support research, data collection and assessment activities necessary to put an end to this overfishing. Congress established the legal tool to accomplish this in 2006 by requiring the implementation of science-based ACLs that end and prevent overfishing for U.S. fisheries. Now it must provide the funding to collect and analyze the information necessary to continue meeting that requirement and sustaining healthy fisheries. Increasing funding for data collection and analysis will significantly improve the federal government's efforts to maintain viable fisheries and healthy marine ecosystems.

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<sup>6</sup> NOAA, Saltwater Recreational Fishing Factsheet, 2009. Available at [http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/PartnershipsCommunications/rec\\_fishing\\_facts.pdf](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/PartnershipsCommunications/rec_fishing_facts.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Budget Estimate for Fiscal Year 2011, p. 191.

Sincerely,



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