

Washington, DC – Congressman Rob Wittman (VA-1), joined by 17 colleagues in the House and the Co-Chairmen of the Congressional Sportsmen’s Caucus, today announced the introduction of bipartisan legislation to improve federal management of major saltwater fisheries to ensure a balanced approach in the conservation and management of saltwater fish. The Fishery Science Improvement Act (FSIA), H.R. 2304, amends current law to ensure utilization of sound science in decision-making by federal agencies as they regulate fish stocks. The FSIA aims to prevent forcible, undue shutdowns of fisheries caused by incomplete data as agencies face imminent deadlines imposed by current law.

“This bill maintains the conservation standards intended to preserve our resources for future generations, but allows the time to do it right, ensuring our anglers can enjoy a day on the water, and our businesses aren’t adversely affected,” Wittman said. “There are enormous benefits to the proper management of game species. We want to ensure that decisions made by the federal government are based on sound information, and in this case, sound science and data. With coastal anglers hailing from all 50 states and generating \$82.3 billion in economic impact each year, this industry also directly affects our economy, at the national and local level. Without Congressional action, arbitrary decisions affecting millions of anglers and thousands of businesses will continue to be made. This bill provides some much-needed clarity.”

The [Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act](#) (MSA) is the primary law governing marine fisheries management in United States federal waters. MSA was first enacted in 1976, amended in 1996, and reauthorized in 2006. Most notably, the MSA aided in the development of the domestic fishing industry by phasing out foreign fishing. To manage the fisheries and promote conservation, the Act created eight regional fishery management councils. The 1996 amendments focused on rebuilding overfished fisheries, protecting essential fish habitat, and reducing bycatch. The 2006 reauthorization focused on ending overfishing, promoting market-based management approaches, improving science and bolstering its role in decision-making, and enhancing international cooperation.

The FSIA will amend the MSA to ensure the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the agency responsible for overseeing the industry, utilizes proper science and data as it sets annual catch limits (ACL) on fish stocks. ACLs originally set in the MSA aimed to prevent overfishing, based on scientific advice. The agency currently manages 528 stocks of fish and stock complexes, but only has stock assessments on 110 of them to make adequate decisions on regulation. A deadline set within MSA calls for catch limits to be set on each fish by the end of 2011, while critical data is currently missing on a majority of managed fish stocks.

The FSIA has three key provisions:

- Scientific Stock Assessments: FSIA directs NOAA to set ACLs and accountability measures only on those stocks of fish for which they have up-to-date scientific information to inform that decision.
- Ecosystem Stocks: Establishes an “ecosystem stock” category to ensure continued responsible management of non-overfished stocks. This classification is already informally in use by NOAA but without specific parameters. This bill authorizes the category and broadens the eligibility for stocks of fish that can be placed in the category.
- Extension of Deadline for Non-overfished Stocks: FSIA extends the 2011 deadline to 2014 for stocks of fish that are not overfished and allows the agency to implement the Act.

The legislation is supported by a broad coalition of conservation, sportfishing and marine industry groups: American Sportfishing Association (ASA), Center for Coastal Conservation (Center), Coastal Conservation Association (CCA), Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation (CSF), International Game Fish Association (IGFA), National Marine Manufacturers Association (NMMA) and The Billfish Foundation (TBF).

For more information on H.R. 2304 or to read the text, [click here](#) .