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SMITH, WYDEN URGE NMFS TO SUPPORT PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Letter to Sec. Evans Urges NMFS to Listen to Fishers

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Senators Gordon Smith (R-OR) and Ron Wyden (D-OR) today sent a letter to Secretary of Commerce Evans asking that he intervene to ensure that the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) seriously consider the recommendations of the Pacific Fishery Management Council. The request comes as the Council meets in Portland to decide its recommendations for 2003 groundfish catch limits.

A complete text of the letter is available upon request.

“The National Marine Fisheries Service should respect the insights and input of the Pacific Fishery Management Council and include them in its final decision on groundfish catch limits,” said Smith. “It is my hope that Secretary Evans will direct NMFS to accept reasonable and scientifically justifiable 2003 groundfish catch guidelines made by the Council.”

"Fishers who were encouraged to increase capacity a few years ago have been forced into bankruptcy by new Federal mandates. A capacity reduction program is an essential step in addressing the crisis facing West Coast fishers, and I'm working to make it happen."

Congress created the regional Council structure to better inform federal fishery management. Earlier this year, however, NMFS overturned the Council's recommendations regarding the whiting fishery. Management of the multi-species Pacific groundfish fishery has been complicated by indications of population declines in some of the groundfish species caught off the West Coast. Members of the Pacific Fishery Management Council - including fishermen, environmentalists and regulators - all agree that these fish stocks must be rebuilt and have made management recommendations consistent with this goal.

The Magnuson-Stevens Act, which established the Council, requires it to fully consider local economic impacts in making its recommendations. As such, the Council has tried to balance the need to protect and rebuild particular stocks with the continued harvesting of healthy stocks when and where possible.

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