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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-5501

PLEASE RESPOND TO:

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August 19, 2008

Dr. James Balsiger
Acting Administrator for Fisheries
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
1315 East West Highway
Building 3, Room 14636
Silver Springs, MD 20910

Dear Dr. Balsiger:

I am writing express some concerns about NOAA Fisheries actions to implement the Magnusan-Stevens reauthorization within the Caribbean Region.

I recently attended the 128th meeting of the Caribbean Fishery Management Council in St. Croix, USVI. I regularly attend Council meetings but, in this case, I felt it particularly important that I attend due to concerns expressed by local fishermen that NOAA Fisheries were apparently rushing to meet the MSA deadlines and were unwilling to consider local concerns.

As a Member of Congress, I supported the passage of the MSA Reauthorization. Additionally, I felt that the deadlines for ending overfishing reflected a necessary priority. Saying that, it was my belief and, I suspect that of the other Members, that NOAA Fisheries would employ its extensive technical and management skills to achieve not only timely, but also technically adequate management regimes that were sensitive to the actual situations on the ground. After attending the CFMC meeting, I am concerned that at least in the Caribbean Region that is not occurring.

It seems to me that in their rush to meet the requirements of National Standard 1, that National Standard 8 which requires consideration of impacts upon fishing communities as well as other such socio-economic requirements within the Act are being largely ignored.

This is a particular problem in my District as local seafood is not only an important part of the diet; it is also an inextricable element of our culture and who we are. I understand that you had a taste of that attachment when you were entertained recently by the St. Thomas Fishermen's Association in a reception there.

In this regard, I find it particularly unsettling to hear from my fishermen that important data sets are being ignored, that they are being denied access to the information used for management decisions and that their own proposals for fishery based quotas are being insulted and summarily dismissed.

I am aware that they have relayed their concerns to you directly but have seen neither a response from your office or a change in approach in the Council. I am hoping that this letter might help the situation by assuring you that they have my full support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Sam M. Platter". The signature is written in dark ink on a white background.

DCC/ETdeL