

**STATEMENT FROM
DELEGATE DONNA M. CHRISTENSEN TO
THE CARIBBEAN FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
131ST REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING**

June 23, 2009

I submit these remarks today in my capacity as the U.S. Virgin Islands Delegate to Congress and also as a concerned citizen. I would also like to take the opportunity to thank the organizers of this meeting for facilitating an open forum where we can contribute our concerns and perspectives on the issues before the Caribbean Fishery Management Council and the Virgin Islands fishing community and I regret that I cannot be there in person.

As a member of Congress and of this community, I support our fishermen, and other stakeholders that have a vested interest in protecting our natural resources.

I am confident when I state that we all share a common goal of working through our differences in hopes of arriving at standards and regulations that motivate a sustainable fishery for generations to come.

As the council works on various measures to regulate the U.S. Caribbean Fishery, I implore this body to ensure that the entire process is guided by valid scientific principles, data generated from the Virgin Islands and full stakeholder participation—as this is the only way to ultimately achieve a successful management strategy.

While I cannot be at this meeting in person I want to assure our fishing community and all those present - that I wholeheartedly support the efforts to seek immediate resolve to the issues concerning our fisheries and those who depend upon them.

In my capacity as Delegate to Congress, and member of the Committee on Natural Resources where I am pleased to sit on

the Subcommittee on Oceans and Wildlife, I remain concerned about a number of issues before us today—The lack of St. Croix and St. Thomas specific data to guide the proposals at hand, discrepancies in standards held between the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, and the failure to fully incorporate all stakeholders into ongoing decision-making opportunities.

As we work towards examining the usefulness of catch shares as a fishery management initiative, I hope that we seize any opportunity to resolve existing issues and possibly institute a cooperative data sharing program that may be used to avoid future challenges.

Since the scoping meetings in May, I have reintroduced legislation that would extend our territorial waters equal to that of our Puerto Rican neighbors in hopes of addressing some of the inequalities between the regions.

Long-standing issues of inadequate incorporation of Virgin Islands data must be addressed. There must be a way for previously reported data to be used—at least temporarily—until an optimal strategy for a scientifically validated, cooperative data-sharing program is realized.

I was pleased to learn that some of our concerns have been noticed and additional time has been allocated to vetting current alternatives to proposed annual catch limits in accordance with Magnuson Stevens Reauthorization Act 2010 stipulations.

As we move forward however, I must reiterate that I cannot and will not support measures that neglect the geological, biological, ecological and socioeconomic differences between St. Croix, St. Thomas and Puerto Rico fisheries.

I will continue to stand along with my colleagues in local government in full support of our fishing associations and of ensuring that the Virgin Islands remain fully engaged in the decision making as it relates to the future of our fishery.

As we prepare for the 2010 deadline to set annual catch limits, I am committed to working to ensure that the House of Representatives subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans, and Wildlife schedule a hearing on regional efforts to meet these deadlines. It is my hope that as a result, we have a full grasp on where we are in meeting these regulations and identifying the resources required to addressing the challenges before us.

As I have stated in earlier statements submitted to the council, I along with countless members of the community and my colleagues in Congress will look to see that input from these meetings are given due consideration and incorporated into final decisions. Finally, I hope that the cooperation demonstrated in this meeting between federal and local stakeholders remain constant and become a standard for future interactions between NOAA, the CFMC, local agencies and the fishing community.

I thank you for the opportunity to have this statement placed into the record of this meeting and look forward to continuing to work together to seek a sensible and sensitive resolution to the issues before us.

Thank you.