



Photo credit: Patricia Chambers

Climate-Ready Fisheries Act of 2019

H.R. 4679

Climate Change and Fisheries

Fishing has long supported the families, businesses, communities and traditions of our citizens. But the sustainability of our ocean fisheries, which generate more than \$212 billion in sales and support 1.7 million jobs, is at risk from rapidly changing conditions due to climate change. From warming waters to ocean acidification and deoxygenation to sea level rise — fisheries and fishing communities are extremely vulnerable to climate change. We can already see these changes occurring as many fish populations shift their ranges, become less productive, and face new ecological challenges.

In Alaska, the retreat of sea ice means Pacific Cod is moving north, presenting new issues for managing the fishery. On the Eastern Seaboard, black sea bass — a favorite target of Mid-Atlantic anglers — is colonizing the Gulf of Maine.

Healthy fish populations are critical for resilient ocean ecosystems that support the fishing businesses and traditions we value. The U.S. has been successful in rebuilding and maintaining sustainable fisheries using the science-based management provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Climate change is putting this success in jeopardy. While fishery managers are starting to examine how to understand and adapt our management systems, Congress must ensure those managers have the information and tools needed to deal with these challenges.

The first step in making our fisheries climate-ready is taking stock of what actions fishery managers have already taken — or have been unable to take — to prepare and adapt fisheries for climate change. This information will allow us to develop forward-looking solutions that address barriers regions face in achieving climate-ready fisheries.

A Bill to Better Understand Progress on Climate-Ready Fisheries

In order for Congress to effectively ensure our fisheries are resilient in the face of climate change, we first need to better understand the status of current efforts. Rep. Joe Cunningham (D-SC-1) has introduced a bill that directs the Government Accountability Office to issue a report examining efforts by fishery managers (including the fishery management councils, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, and the National Marine Fisheries Service, or NMFS) to prepare and adapt our nation's fisheries to the impacts of climate change.

THE RESULTING REPORT WOULD:

- ▶ Examine actions already taken by management bodies to prepare and adapt our nation's fisheries for climate change;
- ▶ Examine guidance issued by NMFS to the councils on making fisheries climate-ready;
- ▶ Identify any knowledge and funding gaps hindering action by management bodies to prepare and adapt fisheries for the impacts of climate change;
- ▶ Provide recommendations for how management bodies can better prepare fishing industries and communities for the impacts of changes; and
- ▶ Provide recommendations for how Congress can enhance the capacity of NMFS to undertake the scientific and management steps needed to address climate change.