

# Fish bill clears House, Senate fate uncertain

by Jeff Richardson  
*Tundra Times staff*

Rep. Don Young hailed passage of the Magnuson Fishery and Conservation Management Act reauthorization by the U.S. House of Representatives on October 20.

In a rare scenario, environmentalists were celebrating right along with him.

The original act established an exclusive American fisheries zone extending 200 miles offshore, and created the current system of regional fisheries management councils.

"This legislation strengthens national fishery resources laws and conservation programs within U.S. waters," said a statement released by Young's office.

As chair of the House Resources Committee, Young pushed all summer to get a draft onto the floor for a vote. The final tally was 388-37 for passage, following four hours of debate on 13 amendments. The action now shifts to the Senate, where a draft

bill has not even been released, let alone marked up. Like several other pieces of pending legislation, the fish bill may take a back seat to the evolving gridlock over the federal budget.

The fisheries bill passed by the House contained a number of conservation provisions, including:

- a requirement that regional fisheries councils restrict fishery yields to a sustainable level;
- that councils reduce the harvest of prohibited or restricted species to the extent possible;
- a requirement that fish habitat be protected from destructive fishing methods; and
- a requirement to consider the impacts of regulations on small boat fleets and fishing communities that support them.

Environmental groups and many fishers were especially pleased with an amendment to prevent over fishing. Introduced by Rep. Wayne Gilchrest (R-MD), the amendment redefines the term *optimum yield* to ensure long-term

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economic and ecological sustainability. The amendment had broad support from both Republicans and Democrats.

Another amendment that passed by a wide margin was the measure introduced by Rep. Sam Farr (D-CA) to protect important fish habitat from destructive fishing activities.

"Our members in Alaska's coastal communities have long been concerned about the declining health of the North Pacific

marine ecosystem," said Dorothy Childers, executive director of the Alaska Marine Conservation Council of Anchorage. "(The House action) marks a breakthrough in the process to reduce the untenable level of waste, bycatch and over-exploitation in Alaska's fisheries and a recognition that sustainable use of marine resources are the heart and soul of our communities."

Another amendment passed by the House included outlawing the sale or transfer of individual fish-

ing quotas that may be established in the future. The restriction does not apply to existing fisheries covered by IFQs.

"While reauthorizing the Magnuson Act with strong amendments is no panacea for America's ailing fisheries and the communities that depend on healthy seas, it's an essential start," said Bill Mott, campaign director of the Marine Fish Conservation Network. "It's now up to the Senate."

In a complimentary action four

days after the Magnuson, House members approved on a voice vote a package of other fisheries conservation measures, including:

- an international driftnet moratorium;
- Sea of Okhotsk Fisheries Enforcement Act;
- Yukon River Salmon Act, to implement a new treaty between the U.S. and Canada to conserve Yukon River salmon stocks;
- Fishermen's Protective Act, which, among other things, requires reimbursement of U.S. fishermen fined by the Canadian gov-

ernment in a dispute last summer;

- High Seas Fishing Compliance Act;
- Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Conservation Act; and
- Atlantic Tunas Convention Act.

The package, which had already won Senate approval, now goes to the White House for signature.

"The sea life of the world deserves these protections and it's gratifying that our work has concluded with the passage of these needed protections," said Young.