FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Statement on Senate Commerce Committee Markup of S. 4938, the Bycatch Reduction Act

The At-sea Processors Association (APA), Midwater Trawlers Cooperative (MTC) and United Catcher Boats (UCB) today expressed concern about provisions of S. 4938, the Bycatch Reduction Act, following its advancement by the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

The fishermen and companies we represent participate in the most sustainable and well-managed fisheries on Earth. The Eastern Bering Sea Alaska pollock fishery is the largest fishery in the United States, producing approximately 3.5 billion affordable and nutritious seafood meals every year. It also supports an estimated 16,821 American jobs, $1.15 billion in labor income and $2.54 billion in total U.S. economic activity.

For decades, we have worked to reduce bycatch, conserve habitat and continually improve how we fish. Our members invest heavily in gear innovation, monitoring, research and bycatch avoidance. They take their stewardship responsibilities seriously, and they care deeply about the ecosystem that provides them with their livelihoods.

We are not asking anyone to accept the status quo: we are always looking to raise the bar even further. What is critical, however, is that science and evidence — not politics and misinformation — be the basis for fishery management reforms.

Section 2 of S. 4938 would mandate sweeping changes to where and how we fish. Unfortunately, these provisions ignore the exhaustive habitat conservation measures that are already in place — and the complex trade-offs involved. Moving pollock fishing higher in the water column may reduce bottom contact, but it will increase encounters with salmon. Requiring vessels to fish longer to catch the same amount of pollock will mean more time on the water, greater fuel use and higher bycatch rates. These are exactly the kinds of consequences that must be understood and analyzed before regulations are imposed.

Area-based conservation measures in the North Pacific have been exhaustively designed over decades. Scientists now estimate that more than 96% of the seafloor habitat of the Eastern Bering Sea is undisturbed by fishing activity. The management system is working, and we should build on its success — not impose sweeping political mandates not informed by sound science and analysis.

Media Contacts

United Catcher Boats
Andrea Keikkala, Executive Director
keikkala@ucba.org

Midwater Trawlers Cooperative
Heather Mann, Executive Director
heathermunromann@gmail.com

At-sea Processors Association
Matt Tinning, Executive Director
mtinning@atsea.org