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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AMCC Calls for Strong Federal Investment in Fisheries and Coastal Communities at Congressional Hearing

Washington, D.C. — Today, Jamie O'Connor, Deputy Executive Director of the Alaska Marine Conservation Council (AMCC) and a fifth-generation Bristol Bay salmon fisherman, delivered [compelling testimony](#) before the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries. The Subcommittee heard testimony from five people during an oversight hearing titled *"Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness."*

Representing AMCC and the Fishing Communities Coalition (FCC)—a national alliance of more than 1,000 small-boat fishermen coast-to-coast—O'Connor emphasized the urgent need for robust funding and staffing of NOAA, calling them the "scientific and regulatory guardrails" that enable the seafood sector to function effectively, fairly and sustainably.

"Without a strong and functioning NOAA, we're not just losing data—we're losing stability, credibility, and the ability for coastal communities to thrive," O'Connor said during her testimony. "This is not red tape—it's our food supply, our economic health, and the future of wild seafood in America."

FCC members across the country echoed O'Connor's call for action, demonstrating alignment throughout America's coastlines around core challenges and values.

"The testimony from our colleague at AMCC detailed many of the same challenges we face on the other side of the country, here on Cape Cod," said Aubrey Church, Fisheries Policy Director for the Cape Cod Commercial Fishermen's Alliance. "Commercial fishermen are the economic backbone of our coastal communities, part of a centuries-old tradition of going to sea to not only feed their families, but the nation."

In addition to highlighting the risks of an underfunded NOAA, O'Connor's testimony pointed to the outsized returns to be found through meaningful investment in waterfront infrastructure.

"We urgently need investments in our working waterfronts to safeguard access to the water," Church said, "access that is not only vital to sustaining our jobs, but also fundamental to preserving coastal ways of life."

Ben Martens, Executive Director of the Maine Coast Fishermen's Association, underscored the importance of consistent, reliable federal services to America's community-based commercial fishermen.

"For the small businesses that make up the majority of the fishing fleet in Maine and around the country, stability is one of the most important things that they need to be successful," said Ben Martens. "Stability requires management decisions to be made in a timely manner based upon good science and abundant data, with fishermen input and insights. NOAA's core functions and personnel are the bedrock of this stability and are a necessary component to building vibrant fishing communities for this and future generations."

O'Connor's testimony detailed the significant economic and cultural stakes at risk, noting Alaska's lion's-share contribution to the national seafood supply—over 58% of the U.S. harvest—and the \$1.8 billion in lost Alaska seafood revenue between 2022 and 2023. She warned of disappearing working waterfronts and vanishing small-boat fishing infrastructure that underpin rural economies.

But amid the warning signs of economic loss are also clear signals of opportunity. Recent Executive Orders focused on seafood offer potential for growth and investment, she said, but not without a functioning NOAA.

Among O'Connor's key recommendations to Congress were:

- Fully fund NOAA to restore the scientific and regulatory capacity that underpins seafood commerce;
- Invest in working waterfront infrastructure as national strategic assets and economic pillars;
- Establish a dedicated Office of Seafood within the USDA to better leverage America's existing food systems programs for more holistic food security;
- Recognize safety at sea as foundational to competitiveness, and NOAA's role in providing the data and forecasting to achieve it; and
- Support reauthorization of the Young Fishermen's Development Act as a pipeline for workforce development in America's fisheries and marine trades professions.

O'Connor also called for restoring the original intent of the Saltonstall-Kennedy (S-K) program, reforming fisheries disaster assistance, and treating seafood as a pillar of U.S. food security through federal nutrition and procurement programs.

"We're not asking for a handout," O'Connor said. "We're asking for a fair shot alongside other U.S. food producers. Without strong science, sound policy, and safe access to the water, there is no seafood industry."

AMCC applauds the Subcommittee's focus on revitalizing domestic seafood and looks forward to continuing to work with lawmakers to ensure that independent harvesters and fishing communities remain central to America's food system and ocean economy.

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[Link to Written Testimony](#)

About AMCC

The Alaska Marine Conservation Council is a fishermen-founded, fishermen-run organization that has worked for over 30 years to protect Alaska's marine ecosystems and promote thriving coastal communities. AMCC advocates for equitable access, sustainable fisheries, and the resilience of working waterfronts across the state and beyond.