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**Statement by Eric Schwaab, NOAA Assistant Administrator for Fisheries,
on Today's "United We Fish" Rally at Capitol Hill**

I am here today to listen to those who have come to rally Congress. I know the key to any successful fishery management program is active involvement by commercial and recreational fishermen as well as other interested stakeholders.

Marine fish and fisheries have been vital to the prosperity of this nation's coastal communities for hundreds of years. Today, however, more than 20 percent of the nation's fish stocks are overfished and need to be rebuilt to larger, healthier populations so that they can produce their full economic potential for fishermen, coastal communities and the nation.

In 2006, Congress reauthorized and strengthened the Magnuson-Stevens Act to meet that important goal. This reauthorization was groundbreaking in many respects, including the requirement that we use science-based annual catch limits to end overfishing on all stocks. Ending overfishing is the first step to allowing a fish stock population to rebuild to a level where the stock can be fished sustainably for the long term.

I recognize and appreciate the sacrifices being made today by the men and women in the commercial and recreational fishing industries to end overfishing and rebuild marine fish stocks as required by Magnuson. These sacrifices have the potential to result in significant long-term economic benefits to fishing communities and the nation as well as benefits to the overall ocean ecosystems. Recognizing the sacrifices being made to transition to more sustainable fishing, NOAA and Congress has made a commitment of \$18.6 million to assist in the transition to sectors in the Northeast groundfish industry.

Rebuilding stocks has already led to important successes and significant economic benefits for fishermen, coastal communities and the nation. Some examples are the sea scallop, monkfish, bluefish and Gulf of Mexico king mackerel fisheries. The dockside value revenues in the sea scallop industry have increased from \$84.7 million in 1994 when the stock was overfished to \$370 million in 2008. The healthy bluefish stocks on the Atlantic coast provide consistent, reliable fishing opportunities for shore and party and charter boat anglers and the related economic benefits of sportfishing to a wide variety of shore businesses.

We estimate that once the nation rebuilds all fisheries, which we are on a track to do and required to do by law, the dockside value of our commercial fisheries would go from \$4.1 billion to \$6.3 billion annually, a 54 percent increase. Rebuilding recreational fisheries will help improve the economies of our nation's coastal communities; saltwater angling generated \$82 billion in sales and supported more than 500,000 jobs annually in NOAA's most recent report.

I understand the criticism of the 10-year rebuilding timeframes in Magnuson. However, I believe Magnuson already contains the flexibility we need for rebuilding stocks by allowing certain exceptions based on biology and other issues. Balancing rebuilding for the long-term health of coastal communities with the immediate economic effects remains a challenge for everyone involved in implementing the act's mandate to end overfishing and rebuild stocks.

Although I've only been in my job as head of NOAA's Fisheries Service for a little more than a week, I am familiar with fishing communities, their proud traditions, and the challenges we face in keeping them vibrant for future generations. I am interested in hearing the concerns of everyone involved, and I look forward to a cooperative and productive relationship.