

# Federal funds for catch share programs reduced

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**WASHINGTON, D.C.** — A recently passed minibus will reduce federal funds for catch share programs, but it won't eliminate them.

President Barack Obama signed the conference report for the Nov. 14 congressional conference. Included in the report was a minibus; several bills packaged together. Among these bills was the Commerce/Justice/Science appropriations bill for fiscal 2012, the bill that provides federal funds to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

According to a press release from the Marine Fish Conservation Network, a nonprofit organization of fishermen, conservationists and scientists seeking to protect and revitalize wild ocean fisheries, the National Catch Share Program's funding was cut from \$42 million in fiscal 2011 to \$28 million for fiscal 2012. The office of Congressman Walter Jones, R-N.C., confirmed this.

The congressman doesn't like that the program is being funded at all. Rep. Jones has opposed catch shares, which are being considered for several fisheries in North Carolina, such as the snapper-grouper fishery.

Catch shares are a form of fishery management where a fishery's annual quota is divided into shares, which are sold to individual fishermen, fishing companies or fishing communities.

Once they have a share, fishermen are allowed to fish for their share of a fishery quota at any time during the fishing year. The purpose of catch shares is to create more flexibility for fishermen to plan trips.

North Carolina commercial fishermen are divided on their opinions on catch shares. While some commercial fishermen have supported the shares, others oppose them.

The opponents say that catch shares could be bought up by large fishing companies, leaving smaller fishermen with nothing to catch. They've also said requirements could be set to qualify for a share in a fishery that fishermen who fish in multiple fisheries can't meet.

The supporters of catch shares say they will help increase accountability among fishermen. They also said it will help rebuild stocks by eliminating discard mortality due to fishermen having to throw back fish over a trip limit.

For the fiscal 2011 appropriations bill, Rep. Jones proposed an amendment to prevent funds from being spent on establishing catch shares along the Atlantic seaboard or in the Gulf of Mexico. However, Josh Bowlen, legislative director for Rep. Jones' office, said he wasn't able to do that this time.

"For fiscal 2011, they brought the CJS bill to the (House) floor," he said. "The fiscal 2012 CJS bill never went to the floor."

The Senate first created the 2012 bill. It was put in the minibus package and taken straight to the congressional conference. Bills that are part of the conference can't be amended. Once the president signed the conference report, the CJS bill became law.

Rep. Jones wrote a letter Oct. 31, signed by 18 other House members, to the House

Appropriations Committee and the House Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies, asking them not to include catch share funding in the fiscal 2012 bill. This letter, however, wasn't included in the conference report.

Mr. Bowlen said Rep. Jones is grateful for the catch share program cut. However, he said the congressman feels it's not enough.

"It still allows for millions to be spent on programs that are proven to cost jobs," Mr. Bowlen said. "There are many different tools to manage species, so the congressman's position is 'why use a measure known to cost tens of millions?'"

The N.C. Fisheries Association, a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting the state's seafood industry, supports Rep. Jones' opinion on catch shares. Sean McKeon, association president, said more and more people along the coast are realizing catch shares aren't the way to go.

"The idea behind this is there are too many fishermen and not enough fish, which isn't correct, and the only way to protect them is to have fewer fishermen," he said. "This would result in people going out of business when they know there are plenty of fish, but people won't be able to catch them because they weren't among the chosen few (to qualify for catch shares)."

Mr. McKeon said catch share legislation is being pushed by environmental groups.

"We're looking at a situation where people who don't even fish will own all the fish and will have a sharecropper arrangement with the fishermen," he said.

The Coastal Conservation Association, a multi-state nonprofit organization of recreational fishermen, is lukewarm about the catch share funds. Dick Brame, CCA Atlantic states fisheries director, said the association isn't opposed to the funding of catch shares but thinks the money would be better spent on stock assessments and data collection programs.