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WASHINGTON (Saving Seafood) - March 1, 2017 - In his first address to Department of Commerce employees this morning, newly confirmed Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross included U.S. fisheries among his top priorities for the department.

In a list of ten challenges facing the Commerce Department's 47,000 employees, including the launch of more NOAA satellites and changes to the methodology of the 2020 U.S. Census, Mr. Ross specifically identified the need for "obtaining maximum sustainable yield for our fisheries."

Maximum sustainable yield (MSY) refers to the largest catch that can be sustainably taken from a fish stock over an indefinite period of time.

Promoting sustainable fishing by achieving maximum sustainable yield is one of the primary goals of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), the chief law governing fisheries management in the U.S.

The U.S. commercial fishing industry is a vital part of the U.S. economy, with landings of 9.7 billion pounds of seafood in 2015 worth \$5.2 billion, according to the latest "Fisheries of the United States" report from NOAA Fisheries. Nevertheless, nearly 90 percent of seafood consumed in the U.S. is imported into the country.

Mr. Ross has previously expressed his support for domestic fisheries and his desire to reduce America's reliance on seafood imports, which has created an \$11 billion trade deficit for the U.S. seafood industry.

"Given the enormity of our coastlines, given the enormity of our freshwater, I would like to try to figure out how we can become much more self-sufficient in fishing and perhaps even a net exporter," Mr. Ross said at his January confirmation hearing, according to Politico.

Mr. Ross was confirmed in a Senate vote 72-27 Monday night. He is a successful billionaire investor and founder of the private equity firm WL Ross & Co., from which he has agreed to divest as he takes on his new government role.