

Senator Stevens wants to curb overfishing

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Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, is calling to boost safeguards for the nation's coastal fisheries to curb overfishing.

In the Senate Commerce Committee, Stevens introduced debate to force the nation's 13 fishery management councils to follow scientists' recommendations on fishing quotas, the Christian Science Monitor reported Wednesday.

However, many members of Congress are against tougher controls because of fears the controls could cause economic harm to local fishing communities.

"There's been a significant amount of pressure to go back to the way things were," says Lee Crockett, of the Marine Fish Conservation Network in Washington. "This (Stevens) bill as it stands now would preserve the 1996 shift to sustainability. That's first and foremost the most critical feature of the legislation."

The Stevens-sponsored bill required any amount of fish caught in excess of a fishing quota to be deducted from the following year's catch, but Massachusetts Sens. John Kerry and Edward Kennedy, both Democrats, and other New England politicians wanted language that softened the quota requirements, according to Mark Powell, national director of fish conservation for the Ocean Conservancy in Washington.

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