



NOAA Strategic Priority

Ensuring Sustainability of Marine Fisheries



America's oceans and coasts are among the most productive and beautiful in the world. With effective conservation and management, the nation's fish resources provide significant social and economic benefits to coastal communities around the nation.

In fact, commercial and recreational fisheries harvest billions of pounds of fresh, healthy seafood and generate billions of dollars to the economy each year.

But America's fisheries, face a range of environmental and economic threats, from renewable energy development to coastal habitat loss and climate change, that can make fisheries management difficult.

NOAA is determined to address these challenges and ensure our nation's fisheries are healthy and sustainable long into the future.

A Landmark Effort to Rebuild and Conserve

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act governs marine fisheries management in U.S. federal waters. Enacted in 1976 and amended in 1996 and 2006, it created eight regional fishery management councils that constantly amended fishing regulations to adapt to changing conditions in the fisheries.



The regulations focus on rebuilding overfished fisheries, protecting essential fish habitat, and reducing unwanted bycatch while maximizing benefits to the nation.

The Magnuson-Stevens Act deadline to end all overfishing in the U.S. by 2011 is fast approaching. While focusing on this pressing need, NOAA also is addressing the long-term scientific and management challenges associated with ensuring sustainable fisheries. These challenges include:

- ▶ Rebuilding fish stocks.
- ▶ Reducing overcapacity in fishing fleets.
- ▶ Developing environmentally sustainable aquaculture.
- ▶ Supporting fisheries management requirements.
- ▶ Enforcing management measures in U.S. waters.

These challenges can also extend into international fisheries, as the United States depends heavily on wild-caught and aquaculture imports to meet its growing demand for seafood.

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Catch Shares: A Proven Solution

One of the most promising approaches to ensuring sustainable fisheries is “catch shares,” an innovative and unique strategy that combines private accountability with management flexibility. Catch share is a term for management strategies that allocate a specific portion of the total allowable fish catch to individuals, cooperatives, communities or other entities. The recipient of a catch share is directly accountable to stop fishing when their specific share allocation is reached.

Science-based catch shares can improve fisheries productivity and prevent fisheries from collapsing, as well as meet conservation targets while improving profitability. Additionally, successfully implementing science-based catch shares nationwide could provide a model for improved fisheries management in other countries.



NOAA, in collaboration with regional councils and state fisheries commissions, commercial and recreational fishermen, and wildlife organizations, is developing an

array of customized catch share programs designed to achieve sustainable use of the ocean. While they are not appropriate for every fishery, recent scientific analyses indicate catch share programs can:

- ▶ Perform better at stock conservation than traditional fisheries management tools.
- ▶ Increase the value of living marine resources.
- ▶ Help restore the health of ecosystems.
- ▶ Get fisheries on a path to profitability.
- ▶ Increase the productivity and economic benefits to coastal communities.

Helping Seafood Consumers Make More Informed Choices

The 2006 reauthorization of MSA provided funding for consumer education regarding the health benefits of wild fishery products harvested by U.S. vessels. Shortly after this reauthorization, NOAA Fisheries scientists published a paper calling for a national program to communicate information about seafood to the public.

These two events inspired NOAA Fisheries to develop **FishWatch**, a Web site that presents neutral, science-based information about seafood so consumers can make informed choices. **FishWatch** (<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/fishwatch/>)

provides easy access to NOAA's wealth of knowledge about seafood, including the latest information on the status of U.S. fisheries, how they are managed, how fish are harvested, current science on seafood species, sustainability practices of the U.S. commercial fishing industry, and other information.



For more information about NOAA's Fisheries Service, call 301-713-2370 or visit <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>.

To learn more about NOAA, visit <http://www.noaa.gov>. 

Web Resources

NOAA's Coastal Services Center

<http://www.csc.noaa.gov/>

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service Office of Sustainable Fisheries

<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/>

NOAA's Catch Shares

http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/domes_fish/catchshare/index.htm

NOAA's Aquaculture Program

<http://aquaculture.noaa.gov/>

The Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/ceq/initiatives/oceans/>