



NOAA FISHERIES FACT SHEET



What is the National Marine Fisheries Service?

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is the federal agency responsible for the stewardship of the living marine resources and their habitat. The public trust responsibility is derived from numerous laws, primary of which are the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSFCMA) Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) and the Endangered Species Act (ESA), which were passed in the mid/late 1970s. NMFS has both domestic and international responsibilities, and is a leading advocate for the economic benefits that can be derived from sustainable use and conservation of living marine resources.

Federally managed living marine resources (generally in waters from three to 200 miles offshore) provide an important source of food and recreation for the nation, as well as thousands of jobs and a traditional way of life for many coastal communities. From the Gulf of Maine, to the Gulf of Mexico, to the Gulf of Alaska, and out to Hawaii and the Western Pacific, NMFS scientists and resource managers work to ensure the persistence and long-term sustainable use of our nation's living marine resources for future generations.

U.S. marine resource legislation is among the strongest in the world. The Magnuson-Stevens Act provides a wide array of protections, requiring very conservative management targets, tight time frames for rebuilding stocks, consideration of habitat impacts, reducing bycatch and assessing economic impacts on fishing communities. Under the Endangered Species Act of 1988, NMFS handles the listing, protection and recovery of threatened and endangered marine, estuarine and anadromous species. The ESA requires federal agencies to use all reasonable methods available to conserve endangered and threatened species, to facilitate an increase in their populations and to improve the quality of their habitats. Congress is currently considering proposals that would reauthorize and amend the MSA, MMPA, and the ESA, which may lead to changes in how fishery legislation is implemented in the near future.

Internationally, NMFS' interests and responsibilities are wide ranging (fish, whales, sea turtles, etc). The development of the United Nations Treaty on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks, along with a major new emphasis on the use of a precautionary approach to fishery management, have refocused efforts on dealing with the problems of overfishing. These national and international changes direct fishery management authorities to implement programs that end overfishing quickly and rebuild overfished resources in a timely manner.

What We Do

NMFS conducts its stewardship responsibilities through a wide range of scientific research, fisheries management, protected species, and enforcement and habitat conservation programs. Using the tools provided by the Magnuson-Stevens Act, NMFS assesses and predicts the status of fish stocks, ensures compliance with fisheries regulations, and works to reduce wasteful fishing practices. We promote the development of new markets such as aquaculture, products and technologies through industry development grants, and we assist fishers through government-guaranteed loans, technology transfer, and economic incentives.

NMFS Fisheries, in conjunction with NOAA's Office of Sustainable Development and Intergovernmental Program, works closely with economically distressed fishing communities in the Northeast, Southeast, Northwest and Alaska regions, to design comprehensive emergency economic assistance packages that aid displaced fishers, and help restore depleted fishery resources. These economic packages are a coordinated government response involving the Departments of Commerce, Labor, Agriculture, Housing and Urban Development, and the Small Business Administration.

Under the guidance of the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the Endangered Species Act, NOAA Fisheries recovers protected marine species, such as sea turtles, whales and dolphins, without unnecessarily impeding economic and recreational opportunities. We support the development of innovative management strategies and technologies to reduce potential conflicts involving protected species. NOAA Fisheries develops and implements conservation and recovery plans, and works to prevent species from becoming threatened or endangered. We educate the public about the dangers of interacting with these wild marine mammals, and we encourage people to follow responsible marine mammal viewing guidelines.

What Are the Benefits

Through effective conservation and management, the nation's living marine resources provide significant social and economic benefits. The sale of domestically caught fish and shellfish by commercial fishers currently exceeds \$3.5 billion, making the U.S. the fifth-largest producer of seafood in the world. In 2000 alone, U.S. consumers spent an estimated \$54.4 billion for fishery products. By producing and marketing a variety of fishery products for domestic and foreign markets, the commercial marine fishing industry contributed \$27.8 billion (in value added) to the U.S. Gross National Product (GNP). Likewise, recreational fishers and marine recreational fishing activities contribute almost an equal amount to the nation's GNP.

NOAA Fisheries works to promote sustainable fisheries and to prevent lost economic potential associated with overfishing, declining species and degraded habitats. We strive to balance competing public needs and interests in the use and enjoyment of our ocean's resources. Through its many actions, programs and research, NOAA Fisheries ensures the continued productivity and abundance of the nation's living marine resources and a bright future for the people dependent upon these resources. NOAA Fisheries' vision for the next decade is to greatly increase the nation's wealth and quality of life, through building and maintaining sustainable fisheries that support fishing industry jobs, provide safe and wholesome seafood, and ensure recreational fishing opportunities.