

Remarks By
Theodore W. Kassinger
Deputy Secretary of Commerce
At a Workshop for Fishery Management
Council Members
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Thank you Bill (Hogarth) for that kind introduction. I am pleased to be here today at this historic meeting of the Fishery Management Council Members. On behalf of Secretary Evans and me, we want to thank you for your involvement and commitment to the fishery management process. I understand that you have not all met together as a group since 1976. I think we should do this more often!

The Councils are critical to the successful management of our Nation's marine fisheries and ecosystems. The Magnuson-Stevens Act, which created the Councils in 1976, mandates that they be made up of knowledgeable representatives from various interested parties: commercial and recreational fishing industries, the conservation community, all states in the region, as well as the federal government. This process, along with the inclusion of non-voting members from the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Coast Guard, the Interstate Marine Fisheries Commission, and the Department of State ensure that we get what we need: a broad range of expert views and ideas.

Bill Hogarth and Under Secretary Lautenbacher often tell me of the good work the regional fishery management councils are doing. In addition, the Under Secretary has told me about how he will be looking to you for your wisdom and your help in meeting NOAA's goal of implementing ecosystem-based management.

Critical to the success of ecosystem-based management is sound, science-based decision making. Sound decision-making in turn relies on careful attention to regulatory requirements, fact gathering and analysis.

Frankly, the agency's record in these areas was not laudable three years ago, as shown by the litigation wave that engulfed the agency and its stakeholders. Thanks to Bill, NOAA General Counsel Jim Walpole, and many others at NOAA, we've made great progress in whittling down the litigation burden, thereby putting agency resources to work on real fisheries issues.

The key to that progress is the regulatory streamlining process we instituted at the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). Bill Hogarth rightly credits the Councils for your willingness to take on more work as we try to frontload the regulatory process. The Councils have made a real, positive contribution to this effort. I add my sincere thanks for all of your hard work in this regard.

The fact is, we need and value your input at the Commerce Department to make informed policy and programmatic decisions and to carry out our mission. And while the Administration is currently formulating a response to the recommendations of the Ocean Commission, including its suggestions relating to ocean management, you should be assured that the Secretary considers NOAA an integral part of this Department, allowing us the unique opportunity to integrate economics, technology, trade, and the environment as part of a formula to expand the economy. Our mission focuses on stewardship- stewardship of our nation's free enterprise system and our natural resources. We seek to create the right conditions for private industry to compete, innovate, grow, and create jobs. And economic stewardship necessarily includes stewardship of our nation's atmospheric and marine resources. The two are linked . . . it is clear that effective management of our fisheries resources helps sustain this country's economic vitality.

The U.S. economy relies on healthy, functioning marine ecosystems for food, for employment, for mitigation of floods and droughts, and for recreation, travel and tourism. Let me mention just a few of many examples:

U.S. consumption of fishery products was 16.3 pounds (of edible meat) per person in 2003 . . . up nearly a pound from the 2002 per capita consumption. Last year, U.S. consumers spent an estimated \$55 billion for fishery products.

By producing and marketing a variety of products for domestic and foreign markets, the commercial marine fishing industry contributed \$28.5 billion (in value added) to the U.S. Gross National Product last year.

Currently, about half of the U.S. population – 141 million people – reside within 50 miles of the coast, which constitutes only 11% of the land area of the lower 48 states. U.S. coastal counties are growing three times faster than counties elsewhere in the country. It is estimated that coastal and marine waters support 28 million jobs in this country.

A few state-specific examples:

Hawaii's coral reefs generate \$172 million a year for its economy in tourism and fishing activities. In 2000-2001, the reefs off of southeast Florida supported recreational diving, fishing and viewing activities that generated over \$4 billion in local sales, almost \$2 billion in local income, and over 70,000 full and part-time jobs.

Recreational fishing continues to be one of the most popular outdoor sports. Anglers took nearly 82 million saltwater trips in 2003. Marine recreational fishing supported nearly 350,000 jobs and generated \$30.5 billion in economic impact to the nation. The healthier and more abundant we can make the fish populations, the better the fishing experience will be for the American public.

There are other economic benefits as well, some of which are more difficult to quantify. We know, for example, that wetlands provide valuable habitat for primary food production, as well as physical buffers against storm surges and coastal erosion.

These examples of economic impact reinforce why all of you are here this week. You are all working together to educate the public and provide input on the management of our nation's fisheries in order to ensure that they continue to contribute to economic growth in years to come. We plan to work with you over the coming years to help ensure a continuous, safe supply of seafood and abundant recreational opportunities.

Thank you for your continued support and thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.