



NOAA FISHERIES

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KEYNOTE

*"Ending a year of milestones and building on success:
We have a story to tell in U.S. Fisheries"*

Introduction

I'm pleased to be here at the Pacific Expo and have the opportunity to speak with you.

On behalf of NOAA Fisheries I want to thank the fishing and seafood industries of the West Coast and Alaska regions for their enormous investment and commitment to U.S. fisheries – you have put sustainable fisheries and seafood on the map.

This region is where the concept of sustainable fisheries was conceived.

The framework of the public-private partnership we know today as the fishery management council process was forged here. And the innovative strategies and collaborative culture between science, management and industry were - by in large - born here.

Today, the U.S. is home to some of the largest and most responsibly managed fisheries in the world. Alaska and West coast fisheries have become synonymous and emblematic of sustainable fisheries, seafood and the job sector they support.

This didn't happen overnight. It didn't come with instructions. Rather, it evolved over 35 years - and continues to do so.

Today, I'd like to briefly mention NOAA Fisheries' commitment to better educating the public about the strength of U.S. fisheries. I also want to highlight some of our future priorities, and then take your questions and have a discussion.

Status of U.S. Managed Fisheries

We have a tremendous story of successful stewardship unfolding in U.S. fisheries. 2012 has been a milestone year in our nation's journey toward sustainable fisheries that began in this region, 36 years ago.

Our process of science-based governance and transparency has become a standard for how to manage fisheries sustainably and is influencing other countries and the broader discussion pushing for international stewardship.

We believe we have turned the corner in ending chronic overfishing and we are actively rebuilding previously overfished stocks.

This is the result of a robust **process** based on science and combined with innovative management strategies that hold wild-capture fisheries accountable to sustainable harvest levels. A process which many of the industries represented here today helped to evolve and establish.

Annual catch limits and accountability measures are now fully in place for every federally managed fishery. These are the mechanisms in place that help ensure catch levels continue to adapt to the conditions of the ecosystem and what can be sustainably harvested.

This is a huge milestone in our nation's environmental evolution and underscores why U.S. managed fisheries have become a gold standard for addressing global fisheries. We need to acknowledge and support our domestic process and focus on replicating and exporting these practices to address the threats of unsustainable fishing occurring in international waters.

In the U.S., fishing overall generates \$48 billion to the gross national product. Despite that fact that we are in a tough economic climate, landings by U.S. commercial fishermen in 2011 totaled 10.1 billion pounds of seafood valued at \$5.3 billion - an increase of 1.9 billion pounds (23%) and \$780 million (17%) over 2010 levels - the highest landings volume since 1994 and the highest value ever recorded - 17 year high.

Americans ate almost 5 billion pounds of seafood in 2011. And while per capita seafood consumption dropped, the U.S. moved past Japan, making us second only to China in worldwide seafood consumption.

Some examples of our management process can be seen in the Alaska pollock fishery where catch was up by more than 850 million pounds in 2011. The reason? Timely and accurate science leading to informed, responsive management. Pollock is one of our signature fisheries, and is considered among the best managed fisheries in the world and a standard for others to follow.

Although the historic origins of our fisheries management process revolved around addressing commercial fishing, recreational fishing in marine fisheries has evolved and emerged as big business in the U.S. - with 12 million anglers, 85 million trips a year and approximately 345 million fish caught - generating billions for the U.S. economy when extrapolated to supporting services and jobs.

As our science-based management process continues to evolve, a critical component of that evolution has been increasing investment to incorporate the data collection and management innovations that include this critical sector and their contributions to the stewardship of our fisheries.

The effectiveness of the U.S. fisheries management model was strikingly evident in the 2011 annual report to Congress on the nation's Status of Stocks which reported a record number of six stocks determined to be rebuilt in 2011, and a decrease in both categories of overfishing and overfished. A total of 27 stocks have been fully rebuilt since 2000.

Arguably the biggest transformation in managing fishing since we first restricted foreign fleets from our waters in 1976 has been the use of limited access programs – or “catch shares.” A bottom-up revolution initiated by fishermen and fishing communities, catch shares are an innovation of Alaskan and West Coast origin that have been instrumental for ‘turning the corner’ in ending the occurrence of chronic overfishing in our nation’s fisheries.

Combined with annual catch limits, the two management strategies of annual catch limits and catch shares have proven to be the dynamic duo of sustainability. Hand-in-glove, these strategies establish sustainable levels of harvest that are then re-enforced by the allotted shares of the fishermen who can make decisions of when and how much to fish based on their own their own business models rather than on the infamous and disastrous race-to-fish model that used to predominate our fisheries and which lead to the deficit of healthy fisheries we are now overcoming.

Together, these strategies are the success behind our largest, most sustainable sources of seafood in the North Pacific. They are responsible for the dramatic improvements we’re witnessing in the Gulf of Mexico, mid-Atlantic, and that we are beginning to see emerge in the Northeast. And after only one year – our west coast groundfish fishery catch-share program has exceeded expectations – with revenues up by 42% and bycatch down by as much as 79% and 96% depending on the species. (INSERT THE REPORT LINK HERE)

Our Collective Challenges

U.S. fishermen can’t do it alone. International stewardship and accountability are critical to the resource and for leveling the playing field for our domestic industry.

Fishing is a global enterprise. Much of what we catch in the U.S. is exported and most of what we eat in the U.S. is imported. We are linked internationally and depend on international stewardship and accountability. We are working to export our practices.

Despite our successes, U.S. fisheries are frequently painted with the same brush of concern intended for issues plaguing international fisheries. Whether it’s shark finning, the race for the last Atlantic bluefin tuna, or pirate fishing – the well intended calls for action to address these global concerns have often translated into punishing our domestic fishing industries which abide by some of the most stringent regulations in the world. It not only impacts the economic well-being of our law-abiding fishermen, it also undermines trust in U.S. fisheries management and does little to focus attention on the real threats.

Management Challenges

We have some management challenges ahead that NOAA Fisheries is actively addressing:

- **Assessing fish stocks:** Scientific monitoring of a living resource like fish or fish stocks is not a perfect or controlled science. You can’t see fish. They move. They get eaten. And they eat each other.

- **Ecosystem impacts** such as climate change, ocean acidification and habitat degradation continue to increase making our ability to monitor and predict the status of a stock more uncertain. Examples may include Alaska's blue king crab and New England's cod stock – where, despite controlled and accountable fishing, recovery continues to elude us and scientists increasingly suspect changes in the ecosystem as the primary cause of continued declines.
- **Future fiscal constraints** – Our nation and the world in general is in a period of economic constraint. At NOAA Fisheries, we are focused on the basics of our core stewardship missions -- to sustain fisheries and safe supplies of seafood and recover and conserve protected marine resources. We need to make strategic choices that maximize national benefit in fulfillment of these missions.
- **Transitioning from open to limited access and accountability:** This transition can be a difficult journey. Making this transition during an economic downturn has proven painful in some regions and challenged public perception and support for the science-based management process we have evolved and invested in.

How We Are Responding to These Challenges

With serious fiscal constraints in the foreseeable future, NOAA Fisheries is committed to addressing these challenges by focusing on our core missions and maximizing national benefits.

We want to expand our partnerships and enhance public engagement about the robust and transparent science and management that underlies the successes we are achieving in sustainably managing our nation's fisheries.

We also intend to place increased focus and urgency on to the need for international stewardship and ecosystem concerns of climate and ocean acidification impacts.

In communicating the rigorous science-based process in U.S. fisheries, we've established an information website called FishWatch to provide the public with accurate, up-to-date information about the dynamic, scientific and public process involved with managing a fishery in a sustainable manner.

FishWatch neither advocates nor discriminates against any particular fishery. Rather, it is designed to educate and demonstrate the dynamic nature of the science-based process involved for a responsibly managed fishery and the ten National Standards under which all U.S. fisheries are managed.

We believe it is important for the consuming public to understand that sustainability is not a fixed rating – but rather a **process** that monitors the resource, minimizes impacts, and is held accountable to harvest levels that can adapt to ever-changing ocean environment.

In 2013, we hope to expand FishWatch to include additional aquaculture seafood species which account for half of the 94% of imported seafood consumed in the U.S. I encourage you to visit FISHWATCH.GOV

With regard to enhancing our focus on science – Science is the fuel that powers our ability to deliver on our public stewardship missions.

Our ability to continue improving the effectiveness of management policies under the emerging demands of climate change, energy development, and continue moving toward integrated ecosystem approaches will require continued improvements and efficiencies in fisheries science.

A key strategy in this pursuit will be “Next Generation” stock assessment technologies and sampling techniques; increasing collaborative partnerships and cooperative research with the broad spectrum of stakeholders, including industry, academia and the conservation community. We also hope to begin the process for developing protocols for including climate information into stock assessments and consultations.

Lastly, I want to mention the challenge of international stewardship and the increased urgency to address the unsustainable practices that are undermining our stewardship and placing our fishing operations at a disadvantage in the market place. Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing – IUU or pirate fishing - not only undermines the effectiveness of stewardship, it undermines the economic well being of our fishing industries.

It's important to note that no one tool or group can accomplish the task of providing international stewardship over global marine resources.

The seafood industry, conservation community, and government must work together to develop a suite of coordinated strategies and tools.

We need congressional support as well. Several IUU-related legislative initiatives were introduced in this Congress. These measures include the Pirate Fishing Elimination Act, the Port State Measures Agreement and the International Fisheries Stewardship & Enforcement Act. We have all of these listed on our website along with more in-depth information about pirate fishing.

Announcing Managing Our Nation's Fisheries-3 Conference

As I've mentioned the MSA has been evolving over 35 years. Twice before in our history, we have pulled together fishery leaders and stakeholders from around the country to assess the current direction of the U.S. fisheries management and to chart a course for the future.

In addition to guiding current management, each prior meeting has been influential in the development of revised fishing legislation to govern our fisheries for the future.

It's time to do that again. I'm pleased to announce “Managing Our Nation's Fisheries-3” conference on May 7-9, of next year in Washington D.C. – Go to website: managingfisheries.org

Closing Thoughts

I'd like to close by summarizing some key thoughts.

The story of U.S. fisheries management has been a journey and is a success story of public-private partnership for stewardship. Our fishing industry has been critical to this journey.

Sustainability is a process -- Sustainable fisheries rely on having a robust process in place that is dedicated to preventing overfishing, continuously monitoring the resources and changing conditions, and quickly responding.

We have a lot of challenges ahead – from changing climates to fiscal cliffs. We will need to make strategic decisions that maximize national benefits and minimize the costs of duplication or initiatives that others provide.

As we move ahead – I hope U.S. fisheries will continue to be recognized for their success and that we can move toward **greater collaboration** between the fishing, conservation, science and management communities to acknowledge and build on our successes, and begin more aggressively pushing for accountable international stewardship, and addressing the serious threats of climate change and habitat destruction that undermines sustainability and our fishing and seafood industries.

I invite you to meet with our staff at booth number #113 – we have both Alaska and NW Regional offices and Science Centers represented with some of our key expertise. Also, we have some of our sister programs from NOAA, including Weather, Ocean Services and Enforcement.

Thank you and I look forward to taking your questions.

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