



Contact: Susan Buchanan
(301) 713-2370

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**NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE PROPOSES IMPROVED GUIDELINES FOR
FISHERY MANAGEMENT DECISIONS**
New Guidelines Address National Standard One of Magnuson-Stevens Act

NOAA Fisheries Service today proposed improved guidelines to help fishery managers implement National Standard One of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. National Standard One requires fishery managers to prevent overfishing and rebuild stocks in federal waters - from three to 200 miles off U.S. coasts - while achieving the optimum yield from each fishery.

Fishery management decisions are based on the ten National Standards established by Congress in the Magnuson-Stevens Act. NOAA Fisheries Service provides the nation's eight regional fishery management councils with guidelines for consistent interpretation of the ten National Standards.

The agency last revised the guidelines for National Standard One in 1998. Since then, the Councils have developed 49 rebuilding plans for the nation's depleted fish stocks. These proposed guidelines were written to increase consistency in how each of the Councils apply National Standard One. They are designed to enhance the Councils' ability to establish "overfishing" and "depleted" definitions and implement rebuilding plans.

"NOAA Fisheries Service is pleased to provide this improved guidance to the Councils as they make the tough decisions necessary to prevent overfishing and rebuild depleted fisheries," said Bill Hogarth, director of NOAA Fisheries Service. "The new guidelines will result in more immediate benefits to marine ecosystems while maintaining a reasonable amount of flexibility to address the needs of fishing communities."

These proposed guidelines would apply to any new fishery management plan and amendments to existing rebuilding plans. The public may make comments on the proposed new guidelines through August 22. Comments may be sent by email to: nationalstandard1@noaa.gov or to Mark R. Millikin, NOAA Fisheries Service, 1315 East-West Highway, Room 13357, Silver Spring, MD 20910.

Under the proposed new guidelines:

- Councils would end overfishing within the first year of a rebuilding plan, except under certain conditions specified by law in the Magnuson-Stevens Act. These conditions include the biology of the stock, the needs of fishing communities, recommendations by international organizations and the interaction of the overfished stock within the marine ecosystem.

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- Councils would set the target catch, or optimum yield, for a fishery at less than the maximum sustainable yield. This change would reduce the risk of overfishing by providing a buffer between the target fishing rate and the rate that would produce the maximum sustainable yield.
- Councils would set a more conservation-oriented midway point as the target time to rebuild, instead of the current common practice of using the maximum allowable rebuilding timeframe.
- Fish stocks for which there is little known scientific information would be grouped into stock assemblages for assessment and management purposes. The criteria for a stock assemblage would include species that live together, have similar life histories and are caught by the same gear.
- Rebuilding plans would not expire and would remain in effect until the stock is rebuilt. The new guidelines specify that if a rebuilding plan is not achieving the expected result, Councils should take additional action to ensure success.
- The term “overfished” would be replaced with "depleted" to reflect that fish population declines are not wholly dependent on fishing. The term "depleted" takes into account environmental variations from year to year - such as high predator abundance, low breeding year, environmental phenomenon, and natural disasters.

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public

NOAA, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of the nation's coastal and marine resources.

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