

## NOAA FISHERIES NATIONAL BYCATCH STRATEGY

**I. Assess progress toward meeting the national bycatch goal, its supporting objectives and strategies, and regional recommendations as set forth in *Managing the Nation's Bycatch*, which includes meeting the bycatch reduction requirements of relevant statutes including national standard 9 of the MSA, Section 118 of the MMPA, and the take prohibitions of the ESA.**

Background: The 1998 report *Managing the Nation's Bycatch* contains the following national bycatch goal: "to implement conservation and management measures for living marine resources that will minimize, to the extent practicable, bycatch and the mortality of bycatch that cannot be avoided." It is important to note that the report addresses bycatch as occurring in recreational and subsistence fisheries as well as commercial fishing operations. Seven national objectives are listed in the report as supporting achievement of NMFS' national bycatch goal, and these 7 objectives are broken down into 22 individual strategies consisting of 69 individual, substantive components. The report also contains numerous regional recommendations. There has not been a comprehensive review of agency progress toward meeting these objectives, strategies, and regional recommendations. In addition, it may be necessary to strengthen the national bycatch goal, objectives, strategies, and regional recommendations to address any deficiencies that are identified. However, it is important to note that new and improved bycatch assessment and research will require increases in dedicated agency resources and funding.

Objective: A headquarters-based team, along with an Atlantic highly migratory species (HMS) team and regional teams consisting of representatives from NMFS regional offices and science centers, in consultation with Regional Fishery Management Councils, will:

1. assess the progress of and identify barriers to NMFS implementation of the national goal, objectives, strategies, and regional recommendations published in *Managing the Nation's Bycatch*;
2. recommend ways to strengthen the national bycatch goal, objectives, strategies, and regional recommendations to ensure adequate consideration of protected species and address any deficiencies that are identified; and
3. identify gaps and prioritize related funding needs to fulfill the bycatch goal.

This objective will build and elaborate upon regional bycatch matrices in development that summarize bycatch levels and management measures in various fisheries. This objective also will note management measures that are implemented to address nonbycatch issues that ultimately can affect both bycatch and the extent to which it is practicable to reduce bycatch.

Products/Time frame: Submission by July 2003 to the Assistant Administrator (AA) for fisheries, of "regional report cards" that:

1. document progress toward meeting the national goal, objectives, strategies, and regional recommendations;
2. suggest ways to enhance compliance with existing bycatch mandates under the MSA (e.g., national standard 9) and Section 118 of the MMPA;
3. suggest ways to enhance compliance with the take prohibitions of the ESA and to reduce takes of migratory birds;
4. recommend ways to strengthen the national bycatch goal, objectives, strategies, and

- regional recommendations to ensure adequate consideration of protected species and address any deficiencies that are identified;
5. list related bycatch management gaps by priority of funding needs; and
  6. recommend updates to the goal, objectives, strategies, and regional recommendations of the 1998 report as appropriate.

Responsible person(s): Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries; Regional Administrators; HMS Division Chief

## **II. Develop a national approach to a standardized bycatch reporting methodology.**

Background: Section 303(a)(11) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) states that any FMP that is prepared by any Council, or by the Secretary of Commerce, with respect to any fishery, shall “establish a standardized reporting methodology to assess the amount and type of bycatch occurring in the fishery...” Section 303(a)(12) of the MSA states that any FMP that is prepared by any Council, or by the Secretary of Commerce, with respect to any fishery, shall “assess the type and amount of fish caught and released alive during recreational fishing under catch and release fishery management programs and the mortality of such fish...” The MSA National Standard Guidelines published in the *Federal Register* on May 1, 1998 further state that Regional Fishery Management Councils must “Promote development of a database on bycatch and bycatch mortality in the fishery to the extent practicable. A review and, where necessary, improvement of data collection methods, data sources, and applications of data must be initiated to determine the amount, type, disposition, and other characteristics of bycatch and bycatch mortality for the purposes of this standard and of section 303(a)(11) and (12) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act.” The MSA currently requires that this be specified on a fishery-by-fishery basis, but fishery interactions and the deployment of observers and other data collection systems across all commercial and recreational fisheries indicate the need for a coordinated approach.

Objective: A national in-house working group will be convened to:

1. evaluate the current methodologies for estimating bycatch,
2. review the current use of self-reporting to estimate discards,
3. evaluate the potential for estimating discards by inferences drawn from fishery independent surveys,
4. recommend a statistical design for observer programs to cover all U.S. fisheries,
5. recommend standards of precision to be achieved for discard estimates, and
6. recommend observer sample sizes and associated costs for all U.S. fisheries.

Product/Time frame: The working group will submit a final report to the Assistant Administrator for Fisheries by June 2003.

Responsible person(s): Working Group Chair

## **III. Implement the national bycatch goal through regional implementation plans.**

Objective: Based on the assessment from the first and second components, regional teams will produce regional implementation plans and timelines to implement the national bycatch goal.

These plans will be developed in concert with national policy and guidance on bycatch and should reflect any updating of the goal, objectives, and strategies of the 1998 report.

Product: Creation and implementation of regional and Atlantic HMS implementation plans. The plans will include:

1. criteria for identifying “vulnerability” of discard species to adverse impacts,
2. application of those criteria to identify the most serious discard problems,
3. identification and evaluation of alternatives for reducing the adverse impacts of discards (including at least the reduction or elimination of overfishing target species, modification of fishing gear and/or fishing practices, time and/or area restrictions on fishing, and factors that determine the likelihood of success using each of the alternatives), and
4. strategies for solving the problems that have been identified.

Time frame: The timing of the actual implementation of these plans will vary, depending on rulemaking schedules as well as resources, but will all be submitted to the Assistant Administrator for Fisheries by September 2003.

Responsible person(s): Regional Administrators, HMS Division Chief

**IV. Undertake education and outreach involving cooperative efforts, at the regional level (and other levels as appropriate), by fishery managers, scientists, fishermen, and other stakeholders to develop effective and efficient methods for reducing bycatch.**

Background: A shared and accurate understanding of the fishery-specific bycatch problem and the active participation of fishermen in developing fishery-specific methods to decrease bycatch are required to address the bycatch problem effectively and efficiently. The 2002 International Fishers Forum highlighted the importance of gaining the commitment of fishers to reduce bycatch in fisheries. Education and outreach programs are elements of the NMFS national goal in *Managing the Nation’s Bycatch*. Based on experiences in a variety of fisheries, an effective way to tackle some of the bycatch issues is through direct fisherman involvement.

Objective: Creation of a plan for expanding education and outreach activities involving the establishment of, coordination, and communications among regional working groups that specialize in fishery-specific bycatch issues. These regional groups may ultimately include regional marine advisory officers and others who work closely with fishermen. The purpose of these groups will be to formulate fishery-specific, effective, and efficient methods for cooperatively reducing bycatch. These methods could include incentive programs and/or other programs to encourage fishermen to reduce bycatch and assist in providing accurate estimates of bycatch. Incentives might include allocations of fish or extended fishing times to fishermen who voluntarily use specialized gear and fishing tactics to successfully reduce bycatch. Education and outreach will be an element of every regional plan developed in the third component.

Product: Creation of a plan for expanding education and outreach activities involving the establishment of, coordination, and communications among regional working groups that specialize in fishery-specific bycatch issues. This effort will include sponsorship of symposia (including a major international bycatch symposium at the American Fisheries Society’s 2003

annual meeting), workshops, and other bycatch education and outreach activities. In addition, this effort will include updating and enhancing of the NMFS bycatch feature website (<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/bycatch.htm>) on a regular basis.

Time frame: Regional and Atlantic HMS education and outreach plans will be submitted to the Assistant Administrator for Fisheries by September 2003. Other education and outreach activities will be ongoing.

Responsible persons: Regional Administrators, HMS Division Chief (for education and outreach plans); Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, and Chair, NMFS National Standing Working Group on Fishing Technology for other efforts

**V. Utilize existing partnerships and develop new international approaches to reducing bycatch of living marine resources including fish stocks, sea turtles, marine mammals, and migratory birds, where appropriate.**

Background: The bycatch challenges facing NMFS involve foreign and international fisheries and are impossible to adequately address without international cooperation. Annual reports to Congress assessing the need for international bycatch agreements required by section 202(h) of the MSA have been made since 1996. In addition, an International Bycatch Reduction Task Force has been created, and its activities are included in the most recent 202(h) report to Congress.

Objective: Address international approaches to reduce bycatch of living marine resources including fish stocks, sea turtles, marine mammals, and migratory birds extending beyond U.S. waters and examine existing international agreements for potential broadening and for progress in implementation. Regional fishery management organizations (RFMOs) and other fora will also be examined for effectiveness in resolving regional bycatch problems and as alternative fora for yielding more expedient results. Continuing activities will include seeking bycatch assessment and reduction on a bilateral basis and through regional fisheries management organizations.

Product: Continued and strengthened efforts to address international approaches to reduce bycatch and examine international bycatch agreements, organizations, and other fora for effectiveness in resolving bycatch problems. Such efforts may result in amendments to existing international agreements, new agreements, and/or changes in RFMO practices. In addition, NMFS will continue to report to Congress annually with an assessment of the need for international bycatch agreements as required by section 202(h) of the MSA.

Time frame: Ongoing

Responsible persons: Chair, International Bycatch Reduction Task Force; Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries

**VI . Identify new funding requirements to effectively support the NMFS National Bycatch Strategy on an ongoing basis.**

Background: Full realization of the National Bycatch Strategy will require significant resources. The NOAA Fisheries comprehensive 5-year plan “NOAA Fisheries’ Requirements for Improved and Integrated Conservation of Fisheries, Protected Resources, and Habitat (Requirements Plan)” identifies budget requirements to address bycatch. As the newly announced National Bycatch Strategy matures into a more robust strategy over the coming months and years, funding needs and priorities will be revisited. The attainment of adequate funding is essential to the success of the National Bycatch Strategy.

Objective: NMFS headquarters staff will use gaps and funding needs identified by the Atlantic HMS team and the regional teams as part of the first component of the National Bycatch Strategy, observer costs estimated by the national working group under the second component of the National Bycatch Strategy, as well as other sources, to identify new agency funding requirements and make recommendations to modify NMFS’s comprehensive 5-year Requirements Plan.

Product: Identification of new agency funding requirements and recommendations to modify the Requirements Plan.

Time frame: Beginning in July 2003 and ongoing

Responsible person(s): Chief, Fisheries Statistics & Economics Division, F/ST; Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries