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NOAA Outlines Annual Catch Limits to End Overfishing

NOAA's Fisheries Service today outlined a plan to establish annual catch limits designed to help restore federally managed marine fish stocks.

Annual catch limits are the amount of each type of fish allowed to be caught in a year and are required by the 2007 amendments to the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Additionally, the act calls for measures to ensure these limits are followed and that the limits do not exceed the scientific recommendations made by the regional fishery management councils' scientific committees.

"Annual catch limits for fish stocks will help the nation meet the call by the president and Congress to end overfishing," said Jim Balsiger, acting assistant administrator for NOAA's Fisheries Service. "They will help sustain and recover stocks that provide the nation with valuable seafood and recreational opportunities, as well as benefits to the ocean environment."

NOAA's Fisheries Service, the regional fishery management councils, and fishing communities have taken significant steps toward ending overfishing and rebuilding stocks in recent years. In 2007, seven fish stocks were removed from the overfishing list. However, 41 fish stocks in U.S. ocean waters continue to be fished at unsustainable levels.

The guidelines published in the Federal Register today propose to set up a system of catch limits and targets for each stock to prevent overfishing. The system would account for scientific uncertainty in estimating catch limits for a stock, and include accountability measures to prevent annual catch limits from being exceeded, and to address such a situation quickly if it does occur.

Annual catch limits will be required for all U.S. commercial and recreational fisheries subject to overfishing by 2010, and all other stocks by 2011. NOAA hopes to issue final guidelines on annual catch limits by the end of 2008.

"Ending overfishing on these stocks and preventing overfishing from occurring on others is critical to maintaining and rebuilding our valuable fisheries resources," said Balsiger. "The economic, recreational and ecological stakes are high."

U.S. fisheries contribute more than \$35 billion annually to the economy and an estimated \$20 billion is spent on recreational fishing activities each year.

The proposed guidelines may be viewed online at <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/msa2007/>. Public comments on the proposed revisions will be accepted through Sept. 8, 2008.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 70 countries and the European

Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.