



Contact: Connie Barclay
301-713-2370

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NOAA Issues Final Guidance on Annual Catch Limits to End Overfishing

NOAA's Fisheries Service today issued final guidance on annual catch limits designed to help restore federally managed marine fish stocks and end overfishing.

Annual catch limits are amounts of fish allowed to be caught in a year. The 2007 amendments to the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act required fishery management plans to establish mechanisms for specifying annual catch limits at such levels that overfishing does not occur. Additionally, the act calls for measures to ensure accountability with these limits, and that the limits do not exceed the scientific recommendations made by the regional fishery management councils' scientific committees.

"The Magnuson-Stevens Act requires that we end overfishing by 2010," said Jim Balsiger, acting NOAA assistant administrator for NOAA's Fisheries Service. "The commercial seafood industry and recreational saltwater fishing provide our nation food, jobs and other incredible benefits that we want to continue for future generations when we end overfishing. "

NOAA's Fisheries Service, the eight regional fishery management councils, and fishing communities themselves have taken significant steps toward ending overfishing and rebuilding stocks in recent years. In 2007, seven fish stocks were removed from the overfishing list. Approximately 40 stocks are still experiencing overfishing, however, NOAA's Fisheries Service and the fishery management councils are in the process of ending overfishing for these stocks.

Annual catch limits are required for U.S. commercial and recreational fisheries subject to overfishing by 2010, and for all other stocks by 2011.

The final guidance published in the Federal Register today outlines a system of catch limits, reference points and targets that can be used for each stock to prevent overfishing. The system accounts for scientific uncertainty in estimating catch limits for a stock, and calls for strong accountability measures to prevent annual catch limits from being exceeded, and to address such a situation quickly if it does occur.

"We believe that these guidelines lay a strong yet flexible foundation for ending overfishing around the country, and we will work closely with the councils to ensure success," Balsiger said. "The economic, recreational and ecological stakes are high, and these guidelines are a critical step as we move forward."

U.S. commercial and recreational fisheries generated more than \$185 billion in sales and supported more than two million jobs nationwide in 2006, the latest data available. The commercial fishing industry — harvesters, seafood processors and dealers, seafood wholesalers and seafood retailers — accounted for \$103 billion in sales, and supported 1.5 million jobs in 2006. Recreational saltwater fishing generated \$82 billion in sales and supported 534,000 jobs in 2006.

NOAA's Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA's 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. To learn more about NOAA's Fisheries Service, please visit <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>.

NOAA understands and predicts changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and conserves and manages our coastal and marine resources. Visit <http://www.noaa.gov>.

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