

**Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee
Report by the Bycatch Subcommittee
May 15, 2003, San Diego, California**

**NOAA Fisheries' National Bycatch Initiative
MAFAC Response and Recommendations**

MAFAC's Bycatch Subcommittee met to review the material presented at the MAFAC Committee meeting and provides the following report:

NATIONAL BYCATCH STRATEGY

The Subcommittee emphasizes the need to take a regional approach to addressing bycatch issues. The goals of the law are to minimize bycatch to the extent practicable and reduce mortality where avoidance cannot be accomplished. While this should not be considered an excuse to ignore efforts to reduce bycatch, the reality of imprecise stock assessments, conflicting regulatory requirements, and the basic needs of fishermen - recreational, commercial, and tribal - to conduct their operations means that some level of bycatch is likely to continue. Working regionally and fully involving local fishing participants is the best way to find practical ways to reduce bycatch. This involvement should include outreach efforts conducted by NMFS in cooperation with Sea Grant and local groups.

While there may be some utility in providing a basic national framework, the concept of developing programs from the bottom up (i.e., by involving local participants) rather than from the top down should also apply to the development of standardized reporting methodologies. The law provides that reporting be established on a fishery-by-fishery basis; the Subcommittee believes that there are substantial differences among fisheries and that a national strategy may not work.

The Subcommittee asks that it be kept up to date on progress in developing and implementing the National Bycatch Strategy, requests that we receive a copy of the report to the International Bycatch Reduction Task Force.

FULL UTILIZATION

The Subcommittee believes that full utilization can be a viable tool in some fisheries, although circumstances (amount of bycatch, type of bycatch, ecosystem concerns, market conditions) will vary among fisheries. Thus, full utilization should be considered on a fishery-by-fishery basis and must involve concrete goals and objectives. For example, there is a situation common in rural areas on the west coast and in Alaska where bycatch has to be discarded even though the same fish are utilized for subsistence. Mortality reductions might better be achieved by allowing bycatch to be used or subsistence.

The Subcommittee appreciated receiving the update on west coast full retention programs. The Subcommittee recommends that NMFS reconvene a task force to examine full utilization in the context of exempted fishing permits in the Pacific groundfish fishery. The task force should involve users (fishermen and processors), managers, scientists, enforcement, and the public.

The Subcommittee was asked to examine 3 questions in the context of full utilization requirements for exempted fishing permits:

1. Is full retention a viable management tool which we should continue to pursue? Yes, if it is examined on a fishery-by-fishery basis under a concrete set of goals and objectives which recognize conservation principles and is initially done on an interim basis.

2. How can we make progress in better utilizing economic (non-marketable) discards? There needs to be a careful balance between making such discards marketable and creating an incentive for a target fishery. Again, a regional approach with full involvement of local stakeholders is the best way to proceed.

3. What safeguards are appropriate to stay within fishing mortality limits for managed species?

One major safeguard is to ensure that there is no economic incentive to increase bycatch. Another approach may involve caps on the amount of bycatch that can be retained.

In all cases, there is a need for proper levels of monitoring and enforcement.

AFS BYCATCH SYMPOSIUM

The Subcommittee appreciates being invited by NMFS to help develop the bycatch program. The Chair of the Bycatch Subcommittee will represent MAFAC at the symposium. The Subcommittee Chair welcomes any thoughts and ideas from other MAFAC members in regard to his presentation.

MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

The Subcommittee wants to remind members that the MPA Advisory Panel will hold its initial meeting in June in Washington, D.C. MAFAC member Mel Moon is also a member of the MPA Advisory Panel and will provide a report to MAFAC at the conclusion of the MPA meeting.