From the Assistant Administrator/February 09

Transitions:

We have a new Administration, a new Congress, and new NOAA leaders will soon come on board. We look forward to discussing our approaches to marine resource management with the incoming Administration and Congress, and discovering their priorities on environmental issues.

NOAA Fisheries Service will increase research efforts on climate change and continue to protect vulnerable species and habitats. We also will continue our progress towards rebuilt and fully utilized fisheries. Our commercially valuable fisheries are currently being managed for sustainability and have measures in place or being developed to end overfishing and rebuild stocks. Our goal this year is to continue to work with the Councils, States, and regional Commissions to implement those plans and provide stable fishing opportunities for our coastal communities.

It is completely clear that the world's wild capture fisheries are unable to meet the growing demand for seafood. Imports account for about 85 percent of the seafood we consume, and about half of that comes from aquaculture. Sustainable aquaculture is a tool that we should have in our nation's food production tool box. As we transition into the new Administration, we must remember that additional U.S. aquaculture could be an engine for job creation in coastal communities while increasing the safety and sustainability of our own seafood supply.

For NOAA Fisheries Service, 2008 has been a busy and productive year. Working with our constituents and state and federal partners, we have continued our emphasis on ending overfishing. We continue to stay on track with implementing the reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, and I invite you to review our progress at http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/statusoffisheries/SOSmain.htm We have continued our mandate to protect and rebuild protected resources through the Endangered Species Act and Marine Mammal Protection Act, and our cooperative habitat protection programs are equipping citizens with the knowledge, tools, and resources to improve fish habitat in coastal areas.

NOAA scientists are immersed in global climate change studies, developing and implementing processes to assess entire ecosystems; a major step forward in ecosystem approaches to management. I believe that effectively managing living marine resources affected by climate change will be a central part of our work in future years.

The Climate Change 2007 Synthesis Report has already spelled out anticipated ocean impacts, including "shifts in ranges and changes in algal, plankton and fish abundance…range changes and earlier fish migrations…" Ocean acidification is expected to affect coral reefs and their dependent species.

Precise impacts will vary from place to place, and from species to species. But changing fish distributions and abundances will undoubtedly affect the communities that harvest these stocks. Complicating any actions will be new challenges, new data to collect, or changes in surveys that will advance our understanding of marine ecosystems.

We do not yet know the future ocean initiatives the new Administration may pursue, but we look forward to the next four years knowing that our history of science, stewardship and service will continue to provide sustainable fisheries, protect threatened species and provide the habitat essential to marine life.

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