

NOAA Knows...

# Fisheries Management

Seafood is big business in the United States, and NOAA's Fisheries Service is working to ensure that consumers get the best seafood possible, while maintaining healthy fish stocks and marine ecosystems.

Healthy fisheries provide more than a great meal, they provide jobs, recreation, and vitality to our coastal communities. Below are four examples of how fishery management tools are working for fishermen, fish stocks, and coastal communities in the U.S.

## Atlantic Sea Scallops

By the early 1990s, sea scallop populations in the northeastern U.S. were near record lows and fishing was at a record-high. By 2009, the stocks are near record highs, fishing is sustainable, and sea scallops have been

among the top-valued single-species fisheries in the U.S. for a decade.

This turnaround occurred because scallop fishermen, scientists, fishery managers, and environmentalists worked

together. Three large areas on Georges Bank were closed in 1994 to any gear that dragged the bottom, including scallop dredges.

Then the New England Fishery Management Council revised scallop management to incorporate the fact that this species moves very little, grows quickly, and has low natural mortality.



The plan defined management areas around concentrations of sea scallops on Georges Bank and off the Mid-Atlantic states that could be closed to enable scallops to grow undisturbed and then reopened, putting in place a type of crop rotation.

These closures promote population growth. We also see population growth in some areas adjacent to these areas. Other keys to rebuilding were limits on fishing permits, equitable shares of high-value trips into rotational areas, and a comprehensive monitoring of vessel activity and catch.



## West Coast Groundfish

The Pacific Fishery Management Council and NOAA's Fisheries Service manage the west coast groundfish fishery, comprised of over 80 species of fish captured by trawlers, longliners, trap fishermen, tribal fishermen and recreational fishermen.



Eight species — Bocaccio rockfish, Canary rockfish, Cowcod rockfish, Darkblotched rockfish, Pacific Ocean Perch, Ling Cod, Widow rockfish, and Yelloweye rockfish — were declared overfished in 1999. In response, the council and NOAA's Fisheries Service implemented strict catch limits, coastwide Rockfish Conservation Areas and real-time management that closes fishing during the season if the total allowable catch is reached.

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All of these groundfish species are showing progress in their rebuilding plans, and one species, ling cod, was declared rebuilt in 2005.

### Alaska Pollock

The Alaska pollock fishery was one of the early U.S. fisheries to be managed with catch shares, a type of program that sets a biologically-based limit on annual catch and allocates a specific portion to fishermen, cooperatives or communities. Well-designed catch share programs eliminate the race to fish, reduce overcapacity and improve the economic efficiency for fishermen.



In the early 1990s, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council began focusing on the potential problems of too many boats fishing for the available Alaska pollock and other North Pacific groundfish quota.

The council pursued limits on vessels, eliminating a number of large catcher-processor vessels from the fleet and establishing a system of cooperatives that allow for accountability of individual catch and bycatch. As a result of this catch-share program, the pollock fishery remains one of the most economically valuable fisheries in the world.

### King Mackerel

The king mackerel stock of the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic, a popular fish for recreational fishermen and commercial fishermen, was declared overfished in the 1990s.

The Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic Fisheries Management Councils worked together to rebuild the stock by limiting catch for commercial and recreational fishing. King mackerel was declared successfully rebuilt to allow sustainable fishing in 2008.



## Fisheries to Watch

Here are two examples of fisheries where tough choices were made to get them on a path to environmental and economic sustainability:

### Atlantic Cod

Subjected to high fishing pressure throughout the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, U.S. stocks of Atlantic cod came close to commercial collapse in the mid-1990s, when a concerted effort to rebuild these stocks began.

Fishing effort was reduced to about one-third the 1994 level for both the U.S. Gulf of Maine cod stock and Georges Bank cod stock. The New England Fishery Management Council controlled new vessels' entry into the fishery and the amount of time spent fishing.

The result: Gulf of Maine cod biomass has tripled since 1994 and Georges Bank cod biomass has doubled over their low point in 2005. Final steps in the rebuilding plan for both stocks are to get fishing rates down a bit further, then keep them there. These stocks are expected to rebound due to low fishing rates and successful fish reproduction.

### Red Snapper



The Gulf of Mexico red snapper stock had been depleted and fished at an unsustainable rate since the late 1980s. In response, the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council and NOAA's Fisheries Service implemented an Individual Fishing Quota program — a catch share program — in the commercial fishery in January 2007.

This helped reduce red snapper catch and bycatch across all fisheries by 2008. The IFQ program reduced participant numbers by 10 percent. Today, the fishery is more economically viable with an 18-percent increase in the price of red snapper for fishermen in the program. NOAA's most recent red snapper assessment has confirmed the stock is rebuilding as planned.

For more information about NOAA's Fisheries Service, call 301-713-2370 or visit <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>.

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