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NATIONAL  
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ADMINISTRATION

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**U.S. FISH STOCKS ARE REBOUNDING, ACCORDING TO GOVERNMENT REPORT  
NOAA RELEASES 2003 STATUS OF FISHERIES OF THE UNITED STATES TO CONGRESS**

The "Status of Fisheries of the United States" report, released today by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), shows considerable progress was made in 2003 to address excessive fishing rates and rebuild fish stocks to healthy levels. In 2003, four fish stocks were fully rebuilt, a record ten species were removed from the list of overfished stocks, and overfishing practices were stopped for five species. NOAA is an agency of the Department of Commerce.

"The American public can feel confident that U.S. fisheries are becoming more sustainable each year as we rebuild fish stocks that were once overfished," said retired Navy Vice Adm. Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Ph.D., undersecretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere, and NOAA administrator. "NOAA and the Bush Administration are committed to improving our environment, as reflected by the progress shown in this year's report to Congress."

Over the past several years, NOAA Fisheries has been steadily turning around decades of overuse of our fishery resources. This year's report to Congress shows that the agency's partnerships with the regional fishery management councils, commercial and recreational fishermen, environmental groups and the states are working to ensure long-term healthy ocean ecosystems off America's coasts.

The annual report identifies fish stocks that are overfished and in need of rebuilding plans, those where overfishing is occurring, and those that have been rebuilt. The report illustrates that fisheries management programs are successfully restoring our nation's marine resources while providing important economic opportunities for our fishing industries.

In the report, the term overfished refers to the size of the fish stock. An overfished stock is one whose size is below a prescribed threshold. When a fish stock is overfished, the population is too low to replenish itself if harvest rates are not reduced. An overfished designation triggers fisheries managers to develop a rebuilding plan for that stock. Overfishing refers to harvesting activities on a fish stock. Overfishing occurs when fishermen are taking too many fish for the species to replenish its population. If overfishing were to continue, the stock would become overfished.

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Of the 894 federally managed fish stocks, 76 are classified as overfished, and 60 are experiencing overfishing. Almost all the overfished stocks are rebuilding under fishery management plans, and plans are under development for the few that are not.

NOAA Fisheries is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public. To learn more about NOAA Fisheries, please visit: [www.nmfs.noaa.gov](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov).

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On the Web:

Report to Congress on the Status of U.S. Fish Stocks (2003)

[www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/sfweb/index.htm](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/sfweb/index.htm)

## **FACT SHEET: 2003 STATUS OF U.S. FISHERIES OF THE UNITED STATES**

### **Rebuilt Fisheries**

Four stocks were identified as rebuilt in the 2003 report. Winter flounder, blacktip sharks, and the South Atlantic & Gulf of Mexico stocks of yellowtail snapper were successfully rebuilt.

### **Overfishing of Fish Stocks**

NOAA Fisheries' 2003 annual report to Congress points to a reduction in overfishing practices for five stocks. In 2003, overfishing was halted for spiny dogfish, summer flounder, South Atlantic yellowtail snapper, North Atlantic swordfish and blacktip shark. Sixty stocks are still experiencing overfishing.

### **Overfished Stocks**

NOAA Fisheries' 2003 annual report to Congress identifies a reduction in the number of overfished stocks to 76. These stocks are being managed for recovery as NOAA allows limited fishing to continue to provide social and economic benefits to fishing communities and make domestic seafood available to consumers.

The ten species no longer overfished are North Atlantic swordfish, pollock, summer flounder, monkfish, red grouper, blacktip shark, sandbar shark, South Atlantic yellowtail snapper, blue king crab, and tanner crab. In addition, since the cutoff date for this report (December 2003), Pacific whiting has been taken off the overfished list.

### **Fishery Management Plans**

In the United States, 46 fishery management plans are in place for 894 stocks, and two plans are under development for hagfish and calico scallops. In addition, two plans - coral reef ecosystems in Hawaii and a highly migratory species plan covering 16 species of tunas, sharks and billfishes in the Pacific- have been approved by the Secretary of Commerce and will soon be implemented.