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NOAA FISHERIES UPDATES FISHERIES RESEARCH PLAN

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) has released the 2004 update of the Strategic Plan for Fisheries Research, which outlines the agency's research direction and priorities for the coming years, announced the Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

"From enhancing our scientific capabilities to improving the effectiveness of research partnerships, this plan represents the roadmap of the agency's fisheries research efforts for the next five years," said Bill Hogarth, director of NOAA Fisheries. "This agency is a world leader in fisheries science and our updated plan will help to continue that tradition of excellence."

NOAA Fisheries is required by the Magnuson-Stevens Act to develop a plan to cover four major areas of research; research to support fishery conservation and management, conservation engineering research, research on the fisheries, and information management. The Magnuson-Stevens Act requires that the plan be updated every three years.

The plan presents several goals and objectives including:

- The deployment of advanced and innovative sampling technologies
- Production of next generation stock assessments of greater sophistication and accuracy to reduce uncertainty and incorporate ecosystem considerations
- Exploration of new technologies and practices for bycatch reduction
- Further development of cooperative research efforts
- Enhancement of economics and social science data collection to more fully address the social, cultural, and economic diversity of the nation's fisheries
- Establishing an inventory of living marine resource habitats and implementing measures to monitor the trends in habitat availability

NOAA Fisheries' scientific program consists of fisheries research and the publication of peer-reviewed studies and analyses. Agency scientists provide this information to industry, environmental groups, resource managers and others who are dependent on fisheries science to accomplish their missions. Ensuring that this information is of the highest quality and responsive to stakeholders' needs is a major aim of this plan.

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Substantial progress has been made following the roadmap established by the Strategic Plan for Fisheries Research in 2001. Issues include:

- NOAA Fisheries' improvements start with expanded data collection to provide the raw information needed for stock assessment improvement.
- Beginning in 2003, the Expand Stock Assessments initiative has provided additional funding for critical long-term observation systems, targeted studies for particular data needs and application of advanced technology for new and improved survey methods.
- NOAA Fisheries has created protocols for bottom trawl, acoustic and other survey methods to assure the quality of data used for stock assessments.
- A Population Dynamics Fellowship program was created to increase the pool of trained stock assessment scientists. The first of these graduates are beginning to enter service with NOAA Fisheries.
- This fellowship program is improving assessment models through collaboration with universities.
- A National Stock Assessment Toolbox was created to standardize and test common stock assessment models and to make them accessible to a wider range of technical users.
- Stock assessments are being expanded to include ecosystem and environmental information. The quality of all these assessment products are being validated through improvement in the peer-review process, especially with NOAA Fisheries funding for a Center of Independent Experts.
- The results of regional stock assessments, which are critically important to fishery management actions, are being pulled together into a national database to provide more timely and comprehensive reporting to Congress and constituents.

To obtain a copy of the 2004 plan, contact Mark Chandler, Office of Science and Technology, NOAA Fisheries, 1315 East-West Highway; Silver Spring, MD 20910-3225; by fax: (301) 713-1875; or by e-mail: mark.chandler@noaa.gov. The plan is also available online at <http://www.st.nmfs.gov/st2/index.html>.

NOAA Fisheries is dedicated to protecting and preserving the 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 that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

The Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources.

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On the Web:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

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