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NOAA Fisheries Service Says New Technologies to Assess Stocks and Aquaculture Among Its Top Research Priorities

The federal ocean fish managers of NOAA's Fisheries Service outlined the top science and research priorities its scientists will follow for the next three years. Published in the latest Strategic Plan for Fisheries Research, the agency places an increased emphasis on managing fish stocks not as isolated populations, but rather linked together and influenced by the marine ecosystems that they inhabit.

"This strategic vision reaffirms NOAA's commitment to advancing credible, peer-reviewed knowledge about the ocean," said Dr. Steve Murawski, chief scientist and director of science programs at NOAA's Fisheries Service. "As a world leader in fisheries research, NOAA has elevated the profile of marine ecosystems science to support holistic approaches to ocean management."

Other top priorities include continuing the work to produce the next generation of fishery stock assessments that will be more sophisticated and accurate and have the ability to reduce uncertainty and incorporate ecosystem considerations.

Additionally, the plan stresses the need for continued development of advanced technologies such as acoustic techniques, remotely operated vehicles, autonomous underwater vehicles, and submersible research to directly evaluate deepwater fisheries and their habitat. The plan depends on state-of-the-art research vessels to support data collection activities.

Aquaculture is a key priority that has the agency evaluating new candidate species for commercial production. The plan calls for studies on the environmental, ecological, social, and economic impacts of aquaculture and stock enhancement activities. Developing science-based strategies and guidelines for avoiding, minimizing and mitigating negative impacts of these activities is a critical aspect of the agency's aquaculture focus.

The plan renews NOAA's commitment to monitor climate change and its impact on sustainable fisheries as well as ways to proactively address seafood safety issues.

The report centers around four overarching categories: support for fishery conservation and management, conservation engineering, fisheries research and information management. It is organized according to specific research initiatives conducted at the agency's six regional science centers, outlining both recent research activities and upcoming projects. The 2006 reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Act includes new requirements for fishery science to support ending overfishing, collect socioeconomic and recreational fisheries data, and conduct ecosystem research.

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“We are adapting our marine science program to keep pace with the changing planet and the evolving information needs of policymakers, resource managers and the public,” Murawski said.

To request a hard copy of the report, 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 report also is available online at <http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov>.

In 2007 the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, celebrates 200 years of science and service to the nation. From the establishment of the Survey of the Coast in 1807 by Thomas Jefferson to the formation of the Weather Bureau and the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries in the 1870s, much of America's scientific heritage is rooted in NOAA.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 70 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

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On the Web:

Strategic Plan for Fisheries Research, 2007: <http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov>

NOAA Fisheries Service: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>

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