

The Future of Marine Fisheries: Fisheries and Ocean Policy Priorities for The New Administration

Recommendations of the Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee

October 2008

Earlier this year the Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee (MAFAC)¹ delivered a report to NOAA entitled *Vision 2020: The Future of U.S. Marine Fisheries*. *Vision 2020* provided a wide array of short and long-term policy recommendations to serve as guidance for achieving the desired future state of marine conservation and management. Building on *Vision 2020*, this memorandum highlights the highest priority immediate steps that the new administration should take to continue progress on enhancing marine resource management and strengthening the economies of vital coastal communities.

Sustainable Fisheries Policy Recommendations

- **Fully Fund Stock Assessment Work to Support Implementation of Annual Catch Limit and Accountability Measures Rulemaking.** The landmark 2006 Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA) reauthorization requires that fishery management plans provide for the setting of annual catch limits in the fisheries and accountability measures to ensure that such catch limits are not exceeded. Successful implementation of these requirements depends, in part, on constituent confidence that the annual catch limit determinations are based on adequate scientific information. In 2008, only 128 of 230 key fish stocks are considered to have assessments that are sufficiently comprehensive and timely. Continued support is needed to obtain the FY 2009 NOAA budget proposal of an \$8.5 million increase in funding fish stock assessments. Future NOAA budgets going forward should expand funding for this budget priority.
- **Identify Candidate Fisheries for Management as Limited Access Privilege Programs (LAPPs).** Setting annual catch limits in fisheries is critical to protecting fishery resources. Often times, taking the next step to apportion the annual catch quota on an individual share basis is needed to provide economic and social stability to fishermen and provide individual accountability in meeting sustainable fishing goals. The MSA includes comprehensive guidelines for establishing LAPPs. NOAA Fisheries should exert strong leadership promoting LAPPs by completing a review in early 2009 of existing fishery management plans to identify top-tier candidate fisheries to be managed as LAPPs. NOAA Fisheries should consult with the regional fishery management councils in preparing its recommendations.

¹ MAFAC was established in 1970 to advise the Secretary of Commerce on matters relating to conservation and management of living marine resources under the jurisdiction of the Department. MAFAC is composed of a diverse group of stakeholders appointed by the Secretary. Contact: MAFAC Executive Director, Mark.Holliday@noaa.gov, (301) 713-2239 ext. 120.

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- **Fully Fund LAPP Line Item in NOAA Fisheries' Budget.** The FY 2009 NOAA budget proposed a \$4.8 million increase for implementation of the LAPP provision in the MSA reauthorization. The NOAA budget going forward should continue to include this in base funding, and if possible, increase this funding level.
- **NOAA Policy and Administration Should Focus on Cost Effective Implementation of LAPPs.** NOAA's policy on LAPP implementation should identify cost effective measures for administration of LAP programs and monitoring of LAPP participants, including certifying private sector firms to provide catch monitoring and observer services. NOAA administration of LAPPs should employ to the extent possible a common infrastructure for management, data collection and analysis, and enforcement activities to reduce overall program costs.
- **Expand NOAA Fisheries' Office of International Fisheries Capacity to Combat Illegal Fishing Beyond U.S. Waters.** A number of fish species whose harvest contributes significantly to the economy range beyond the U.S. 200-mile zone. Sound conservation depends upon effective U.S. participation in international management regimes. The MSA mandates that NOAA Fisheries help combat Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported (IUU) fishing internationally. IUU fishing not only poses a conservation threat, but illegal fish products adversely impact legally harvested U.S. fish products in the marketplace. It is in the conservation and economic interest of the U.S. to expand the capacity of NOAA Fisheries' Office of International Fisheries to ensure full and effective participation in international fishery management organizations and to help combat IUU fishing.

Issue Areas of Particular Importance to NOAA Constituents

Aquaculture Development

To keep pace with the food supply needs of the nation and the world, and to reduce our seafood trade deficit, a national investment in the development and oversight of sustainable aquaculture systems is needed. Regional investments in technical support, capital equipment and other infrastructure would pay economic dividends. MAFAC urges the new administration to:

- Continue critical efforts to develop a single, multi-agency regulatory and permitting process to support environmentally-sound marine aquaculture in the Exclusive Economic Zone;
- Expand a research program for all of marine aquaculture;
- Implement without delay NOAA's 10-year plan for marine aquaculture development;

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- Re-introduce legislation to codify a statutory framework for marine aquaculture, and designate NOAA as the lead federal agency for implementing a national policy on environmentally and economically sustainable marine aquaculture;
- Support and expand existing sustainable near-shore aquaculture programs.

There is not universal public acceptance of the need for marine aquaculture development. The public must be assured that aquaculture development is undertaken under strict environmental and coastal ecosystem regulations, and this responsibility is best met by the Department and NOAA. In particular, NOAA Fisheries should work with commercial fishermen, seafood processors, trade associations and state and local governments to integrate wild stock production with aquaculture production to maximize the value of domestic seafood production and related industries and ensure our nation's food security. Efforts should be made to ensure that aquaculture products complement rather than compete with wild fish products in the marketplace, and to ensure that coastal communities and residents can be full participants in, and beneficiaries of, aquaculture development.

Climate Change, Coastal Habitat Protection and Management of Marine Resources

Climate change and accelerating coastal development are two drivers changing the traditional approach to management of marine resources. Population pressures on our coastal areas are well documented. But impacts on our fishery resources from coastal development, accompanying increases in pollution, and loss of inshore habitats are not receiving comparable national attention. Concurrently, impacts of climate change, including sea level rise, warming of ocean and inshore waters, ocean acidification and related effects are compounding pressures on our coastal areas and fisheries. While we have made great strides in our historical focus of managing effects of fishing on our fish stocks, we have made few in addressing the substantial loss of productivity resulting from increases in the size and duration of coastal anoxic zones, loss of wetland and other inshore habitats, and other impacts associated with a large influx of people moving into our coastal zones. We are also only beginning to understand the effects of global climate change on our fishery resources.

NOAA is uniquely positioned to lead a national effort to assess and respond to these drivers. NOAA has the scientific and organizational capacity to bring together scientists and managers from diverse areas of climate study, coastal zone management and biological/ecosystem assessments. It can marshal different geographic, sector and governmental collaborators to evaluate and respond to the science and policy implications of these trends. NOAA should take steps to assert a leadership role in the

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federal inter-agency effort in this area of national concern. The next Administration should place organizational emphasis on using the cross-cutting capacity of NOAA to address these drivers as the nation's lead ocean agency.

Recreational Fisheries

In January 2009, NOAA Fisheries is scheduled to implement a landmark national recreational angler registry and data collection program. Enhancement of the nation's recreational fishing data collection program is necessary to achieve conservation goals and improve decision making, including adaptive and precautionary management, by the Secretary and regional fishery management councils. It is critically important that NOAA's leadership carefully monitor the development and efficacy of these programs to ensure that these vital fisheries information programs are operating efficiently and are closely coordinated with the states within the next two years. Additionally, the agency should staff one or more recreational fisheries liaison positions to interact directly with the regulated community. Liaisons should report directly to the Regional Administrators and/or the Assistant Administrator for Fisheries.

Conclusion

MAFAC appreciates the opportunity to provide these views to the incoming leadership at NOAA and the Department, and we look forward to continuing our role of providing policy advice and perspective to the next administration. For additional information on the future of U.S. marine fisheries, copies of the MAFAC *Vision 2020* report are available on the web at:

http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/ocs/documents/Vision_2020_FINAL-1.pdf