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NOAA Policy Encourages Catch Shares to End Overfishing and Rebuild Fisheries

NOAA today released a national policy encouraging the consideration and use of catch shares, a fishery management tool that has shown it can help rebuild fisheries and sustain fishermen, communities, vibrant working waterfronts and culturally important fishing traditions.

“Catch share programs have proven to be powerful tools to transform fisheries, making them prosperous, stable and sustainable parts of our nation’s strategy for healthy and resilient ocean ecosystems,” said Jane Lubchenco, Ph.D., under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator. “NOAA’s policy encourages fishery management councils and stakeholders to explore the design possibilities of catch shares to tailor programs to best meet local needs.”

Catch share programs, which include limited access privilege programs and individual fishing quotas, dedicate a secure share of fish to individual fishermen, cooperatives or fishing communities. Catch shares are used in 14 fisheries managed by six fishery management councils from Alaska to Florida and are being developed in additional fisheries. Both here and in other countries, catch shares are helping eliminate overfishing and achieve annual catch limits, improve fishermen’s safety and profits, and reduce the negative biological and economic effects of the race for fish that develops with some traditional fishery management.

After considering extensive public comment on its draft policy, NOAA added several important guiding principles to the policy, including a recommendation that regional fishery management councils periodically revisit allocations between commercial and recreational sectors in fisheries.

The policy also does not advocate individual catch shares for private recreational anglers. Councils will have NOAA support to consider catch share programs for charter boat and head boat sectors to explore recreational catch share pools that could benefit the health of the resource and the charter industry.

“The purpose of this policy is to provide a strong foundation for the widespread consideration of catch shares, which have proven to be an effective tool to help rebuild fisheries,” said Monica Medina, principal deputy under secretary for oceans and atmosphere. “The key to a successful catch share program is extensive stakeholder involvement in the design of catch shares that take into consideration each community’s particular fishing traditions and goals.”

David Walker, a commercial fisherman who is part of the Gulf of Mexico red snapper individual fishing quota program, has seen how a catch share program can transform a fishery.

“This program has been a phenomenal success for the fish, and when you take care of the fish, you take care of the fishermen,” said Walker, who fishes from the homeport of Destin, Fla. “Before the program began in 2007, we were having to fish under derbies and having to go farther and farther to fish. We were getting fewer and fewer days as efforts were intensifying. Everyone raced for the fish and we were fishing in weather conditions that were dangerous at times. Fishing under the IFQ program implemented in 2007 has been a blessing to us. Now we

have a year round season with very few discards. Fish prices are good. And the fish stock is rebuilding.”

On the West Coast, Steve Bodnar, the executive director of the Coos Bay Trawler Association, has been working with the Pacific Fishery Management Council to help develop a catch share program for the West Coast bottomfish trawl fishery.

“We’re on the edge of doing something great,” said Bodnar, who represents a group of fishermen based in Coos Bay, Oregon, who own and fish from nine trawlers. “This program is opening up communication between fishermen who were used to working alone. We’re going to swap quota to keep as many boats on the water in order to keep our port whole. We’ll also work together to share resources, to develop gear that will avoid fish that are not as abundant and catch the healthier stocks, and to market our catch to help consumers support local fishermen. By working together, we will survive.”

To read the policy and profiles of catch share programs, go to <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/catchshares>

NOAA has partnered with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) to create a new NFWF grant program called the Fisheries Innovation Fund that will award \$2.2 million to support local fishermen and fishing communities that want to consider catch share programs and put their ideas into action. NFWF is providing grant writing training via a webinar on Thursday, Nov. 11, from 1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m. EST.

To register for the webinar go to <https://www1.gotomeeting.com/register/635451856>
To learn more about the fund go to <http://www.nfwf.org/fisheriesfund>

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