

NOAA'S NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE



National Bycatch Report

Overview

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries Service) has begun work on a National Bycatch Report. This report will provide a comprehensive summary of regional and national estimates of: (1) at-sea discards of fish and (2) bycatch of protected species (e.g., marine mammals, sea turtles, seabirds, and other endangered or threatened living marine resources) in select commercial fisheries. The report will also outline actions to enhance bycatch data collection and estimates, and to develop estimates for more of the nation's fisheries. This collaborative project is coordinated by the National Observer Program, with broad participation by staff experts located in headquarters offices as well as Regional Offices and Science Centers.

Why is this report important?

Reducing fisheries bycatch is a top priority for NOAA Fisheries Service, and is required under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Bycatch has become a central concern of resource managers, scientists, fishing industries, environmental organizations, and the public, both nationally and globally. Bycatch can result in death or injury to discarded fish, marine mammals, sea turtles, and seabirds, and may significantly impact individual populations and the marine ecosystems on which they depend. Monitoring and reducing fisheries bycatch promotes healthy marine ecosystems and the best use of the nation's living marine resources.

Where will the data for the National Bycatch Report come from?

Federal at-sea observer programs and other data collection programs (e.g. logbook, dealer reports) that provide bycatch, landings and effort data are the primary sources of data used to estimate bycatch in commercial fisheries. Currently, observer data are available for 42 commercial fisheries. Industry reports provide supplementary catch and bycatch information for many additional U.S. fisheries.

How will the final report be used?

As part of NOAA Fisheries Service's National Bycatch Strategy, the National Bycatch Report will serve as a strategic document to guide future data collection and monitoring and will provide valuable input for setting management goals. The enhanced bycatch estimates will be used for stock assessments, in-season fisheries management, and developing bycatch reduction measures for both protected species and fish.

When will the National Bycatch Report be released?

The first edition of the report is projected to be released in 2008.



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NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE:

Using bycatch estimates to manage, conserve, and protect living marine resources

Sustaining Fisheries

NOAA Fisheries Service utilizes estimates of total removals (estimates of at-sea discards and bycatch in addition to landed catch) for assessing the health of managed fish stocks. The results of these “stock assessments” are used to identify management and harvest strategies for maintaining healthy stocks, allowing overfished stocks to rebuild, and providing the greatest overall benefit to the Nation from its fisheries.

For example, bycatch estimates are used to:

- ✓ Implement time/area closures in the Northwest groundfish fishery, protecting overfished rockfish species while allowing fishing activities to continue outside of closed areas.
- ✓ Evaluate the effectiveness of a fish excluder device in reducing bycatch of halibut in the Pacific cod trawl fishery.
- ✓ Reduce overfishing of red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico through bycatch reduction measures, such as establishing target levels for shrimp trawl red snapper bycatch mortality.
- ✓ Implement quotas required under the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan (FMP) to protect rebuilding groundfish stocks.
- ✓ Conduct studies of finfish bycatch in the California/Oregon Drift Gillnet Fishery.

In the future, bycatch estimates will be used to develop Annual Catch Limits (ACLs) for managed fisheries, as required under the reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA).

Protecting Marine Resources

NOAA Fisheries Service utilizes bycatch estimates of protected species (marine mammals, sea turtles, seabirds, and other endangered or threatened living marine resources) to quantify the impacts of fishing activities and to identify bycatch reduction measures to ensure the recovery and conservation of these species.

For example, bycatch estimates are used to:

- ✓ Develop and incorporate release protocols for sea turtle and smalltooth sawfish into the Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish FMP.
- ✓ Minimize bycatch of sea turtles in the Hawaii longline fisheries.
- ✓ Establish recovery plan goals for endangered and threatened species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).
- ✓ Develop marine mammal stock assessments, as required under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA).
- ✓ Protect threatened fish stocks through in-season decisions to close or spatially reallocate some Alaska groundfish fisheries.
- ✓ Monitoring the effectiveness of gear requirements and seabird avoidance strategies, including gear mitigation research recommended under the MSA.

