

NMFS REPORT ON NATIONAL BYCATCH PLAN

In June, NMFS reported to the Council that the agency is looking nationally at the issue of bycatch through a National Bycatch Strategy, which is comprised of the following six components:

1. Assess progress toward meeting the national bycatch goal, its supporting objectives and strategies, and regional recommendations (as set forth in *Managing the Nation's Bycatch*), which includes meeting the bycatch reduction requirements of relevant statutes, including National Standard 9 of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, Section 118 of the Marine Mammal Protection Act, and the take prohibitions of the Endangered Species Act. Internal assessment to be completed by July 31, 2003.
2. Develop a national approach to a standardized bycatch reporting methodology. Internal draft to be completed by June 30, 2003. Available for Council review in autumn 2003.
3. Implement the national bycatch goal through regional implementation plans. Internal drafts to be completed by September 30, 2003. Available for Council review in winter 2003/2004.
4. Undertake education and outreach involving cooperative efforts, at the regional level (and other levels as appropriate), by fishery managers, scientists, fishermen, and other stakeholders to develop effective and efficient methods for reducing bycatch.
5. Use existing partnerships and develop new international approaches to reducing bycatch of living marine resources including fish stocks, sea turtles, marine mammals, and migratory birds, where appropriate.
6. Identify new funding requirements to effectively support the NMFS National Bycatch Strategy on an ongoing basis. Funding requirements will be identified and incorporated into agency recommendations for the agency's 5-year plan, *NOAA Fisheries' Requirements for Improved and Integrated Conservation of Fisheries, Protected Resources, and Habitat*.

NMFS has completed the first component in internal review documents and has drafted a national approach to standardizing bycatch reporting methodologies. This report focuses on the scientific monitoring of bycatch and how the agency could improve its monitoring programs, as opposed to managing or reducing bycatch and will be available for review later this fall.

Each of the NMFS Regions/Centers is now addressing the third component of this strategy by drafting regional bycatch plans. NMFS Northwest is responsible for addressing groundfish, salmon, and halibut fisheries. NMFS Southwest is responsible for addressing coastal pelagic species fisheries and those highly migratory species fisheries that NMFS now regulates. Regional plans are to have the following core elements:

- A discussion of regional bycatch reporting methodologies that describes and prioritizes scientific initiatives for improving monitoring.
- A prioritization of bycatch-related research needs, such as gear modification research, fish behavior research, monitoring technologies, etc.
- A discussion of potential bycatch management/reduction measures for each federal fishery
- Ideas for enhancing education and outreach efforts on both bycatch monitoring and bycatch management in the fisheries, including setting up partnerships for researching fisheries gear/technology that will reduce bycatch.

The Regions are expected to submit their draft plans to NMFS headquarters by September 30th, with Council review of the draft regional plans to occur this coming winter.