

Pacific Fishery Management Council **NEWS RELEASE**

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NEW REPORT DOCUMENTS FISHERIES MANAGEMENT SUCCESSSES AND CHALLENGES

The proceedings of a November 2003 national fisheries conference sponsored by the eight regional fishery management councils and NOAA Fisheries were published and released today.

“The news is not all bad in the world of marine fishery management,” said Dr. Donald McIsaac, Executive Director of the Pacific Fishery Management Council. “Many West Coast marine fisheries are healthy, and significant progress is being made on improvements in problem areas.”

The conference, held in Washington, D.C. last November, provided an opportunity to review and evaluate domestic fishery management programs. In addition to documenting fishery management successes, the conference highlighted challenges and ways to address them. Keynote speakers included Senator Ted Stevens, Coast Guard Admiral Thomas Collins, NOAA Administrator Admiral Conrad Lautenbacher, Deputy Secretary of Commerce Sam Bodman, NOAA Fisheries Administrator Dr. Bill Hogarth, and Admiral James Watkins from the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy.

“We hope this document will be extremely useful in charting the course of future U.S. fishery management policy, including implementation of the recent recommendations of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and pending reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act,” said Chris Oliver, Executive Director of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, and primary organizer of the national event.

The proceedings will be widely distributed, and are now available on the conference website, www.managingfisheries.org. The 254-page document, titled *Managing our Nation's Fisheries: Past, Present, and Future*, describes fishery management in the eight Council regions and documents progress toward improving the health of marine fisheries resources. The report also summarizes ten panel discussions on issues such as fisheries governance, bycatch, fish habitat, community considerations, and ecosystem-based approaches.

The future looks bright for many U.S. fisheries and fish resources. Sardines, flounder,

pollock, and many other species are healthy and abundant, and other stocks are showing signs of rebuilding to healthy levels. Currently, recreational and commercial fisheries contribute 60 billion dollars to the gross national product each year. Fishery managers are also focusing attention on rebuilding overfished stocks, reducing unintentional bycatch, protecting essential fish habitat, further incorporating ecosystem considerations in their management plans, and minimizing interactions with protected species such as whales, seals, sea turtles, and seabirds.

Decisions on how to best manage fisheries are made at a local level with public participation. The U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy, which recently undertook a comprehensive review of ocean policy, supports the regional fishery management council process. The Commission recommended strengthening the process to achieve long-term sustainability of our marine resources and fisheries through the use of an ecosystem-based management approach.

FISHERY MANAGEMENT IN THE PACIFIC REGION

- **The Pacific Fishery Management Council recommends management measures for fisheries in federal waters off Washington, Oregon, and California.**
- **The Pacific Council is composed of 14 voting and several non-voting members.** Six seats are filled by management agency representatives from the four member states (Washington, Oregon, California, and Idaho), National Marine Fisheries Service, and treaty Indian tribes. The remaining eight voting members hold state-designated seats or at-large seats. Currently, of these eight non-agency members, two are commercial and six are recreational fishery representatives.
- **The Pacific Council has fishery management plans** for salmon, groundfish, coastal pelagic species (including sardines, mackerels, anchovies, and squid), and highly migratory species (including certain tunas, billfish, and sharks). Combined, there are more than 100 species managed under Council fishery management plans.
- The Pacific Council **sets harvest levels at or below the allowable biological catch levels** recommended by our scientific advisors, effectively separating allocation from purely scientific matters.
- **The regional fishery management system is effective**, given its openness, responsiveness, stakeholder involvement, regional focus, and reliance on the best available science. In managing fisheries to provide sustainable harvests, regional councils are mandated to balance conservation with socioeconomic considerations, and to base their decisions on sound science. Fishing community participation is an important part of the regional council process. The four major West Coast fisheries managed by the Pacific Council provide examples of the effectiveness of the existing regional fishery management system.

GROUND FISH

- **The Pacific Council has implemented a number of management measures to ensure groundfish are harvested sustainably and bycatch is minimized.** These include depth-based closures, gear restrictions, quotas and trip limits, and an observer program. An electronic vessel monitoring system is being implemented to ensure regulations are enforced.
- The Pacific Council has created large **de facto marine reserves** that were specifically designed to protect overfished rockfish species. Examples include the 4,300-square mile cowcod conservation areas off California, where all bottom fishing is prohibited; the large depth-based rockfish conservation areas along the continental shelf (seasonally ranging from 13,518 to 19,796 square miles) closed to trawling, and the 36,000 square miles closed to nontrawl fisheries.
- Swift action was taken to reduce harvest of Pacific whiting (hake) when this species was thought to be overfished. A more recent assessment indicates the stock is no longer considered overfished.
- Lingcod are rebuilding to the target level much more quickly than anticipated.

SALMON

- Marine **salmon** fishery management is a success story for the Pacific Council. Recent improvements in ocean conditions, an improved record in achieving spawning escapement goals, and freshwater habitat restoration efforts have resulted in record or near-record returns for many salmon stocks, including stocks listed under the Endangered Species Act.

COASTAL PELAGIC SPECIES

- The **coastal pelagic species fishery** is generally viewed as healthy and well-managed, and management takes a precautionary and ecosystem-based approach. Recent fisheries for Pacific sardine have expanded off Oregon and Washington due to an increase in coastwide abundance and availability of sardine in Pacific Northwest waters, but the total U.S. West Coast harvest has been below a conservatively-set annual harvest guideline. The Council created an ecosystem-based harvest control rule for sardine that recognizes the close relationship of sardine abundance to oceanic and climate variability and the value of sardines as forage for other fish, sea birds, and marine mammals. No coastal pelagic species are overfished, and the fishery is stable.

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES

- The Council is also moving towards precautionary and proactive management of the West Coast **highly migratory species fishery**. A fishery management plan was developed in close cooperation with representatives of conservation groups and recreational and commercial fisheries. This inclusive representation resulted in a comprehensive and precautionary fishery management plan for domestic fisheries. It is hoped the plan will also provide a template to guide improvement of international fisheries management.