



Advancing Agency-Level Reforms to Restore American Seafood Competitiveness

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NOAA Fisheries Assistant Administrator Eugenio Piñeiro Soler announces prioritized agency actions in support of the Executive Order on Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness.



Docked fishing boats at Yaquina Bay, Newport, Oregon, Credit: iStock

Over the past year, I have met with fishermen, processors, coastal community leaders, and regional fishery management council members and staff across the country. In every harbor and at every meeting, the message has been consistent: American fishermen just want to fish, and they need their government to clear the bureaucratic barriers standing in their way.

On July 2, 2026, NOAA Fisheries sent [Regional Priorities guidance](#), providing the regional fishery management councils a clear roadmap of actions to reduce regulatory burdens and better support the health of our industry, while maintaining our public trust duty to maintain stock and ocean ecosystem health. But our democratic council process is only part of the equation. To complement that guidance, NOAA Fisheries is applying the same standard of accountability and results to its own operations, regulatory frameworks, and scientific pipelines.

Today, I am announcing NOAA Fisheries' priorities for agency-level actions in support of the Seafood Executive Order. It will serve as our operational roadmap for regulatory, scientific, and administrative reform. Informed by the 787 public comments submitted under the 2025 [“Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness”](#) Executive Order (EO 14276), these priorities focus strictly on the policy levers directly within the agency's authority.

This announcement outlines our immediate priorities for the agency and serves as a bridge toward a broader, interagency transformation of federal seafood policy. In the coming months, the administration will release the America First Seafood Strategy, a comprehensive, multi-agency initiative developed in close coordination with our federal partners and informed by extensive feedback from stakeholders. The strategy will firmly outline how efforts under EO 14276 have begun—and will continue—to elevate domestic seafood production to a priority in matters of national food security and strategic independence.

NOAA Fisheries will pursue the actions outlined below immediately as we look forward to that broader strategy. We are moving away from regulations that treat domestic harvesters like a problem to be managed, and toward a science-based, common-sense system that recognizes the importance of those who feed our citizens and the communities they support.



*NOAA Fisheries Assistant Administrator
Eugenio Piñeiro Soler. Credit: NOAA
Fisheries*

Highlights of Prioritized Agency Actions

Protected Resources: Endangered Species Act and Marine Mammal Protection Act Management

Vessel Speed Rule Modernization

Utilize input from the Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking to integrate technological advancements into North Atlantic right whale strike reduction strategies, reducing unnecessary burdens while ensuring responsible conservation practices.

Northeast Lobster Fishery and North Atlantic Right Whale

NOAA Fisheries will not mandate the use of ropeless gear. Ensure that any decision support tools or other models used by the Take Reduction Team have been independently and empirically reviewed and any future Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan is based on the best available data rather than worst-case scenario modeling.

Pinniped Depredation

Conduct a biological and economic impact analysis relative to California and Steller sea lions and harbor seals on depredation of valuable stocks in U.S. fisheries and, in collaboration with industry, convene a workshop to explore administrative flexibilities for non-lethal deterrents.

Ice Seals

Review methodologies for assessing long-term threats to ice-associated seals for Endangered Species Act listing and critical habitat determinations including State of Alaska data, and how current long-term modeling accounts for present population data.

Humpback Whales and the Dungeness Crab Fishery

Prioritize status review of the West Coast humpback whale distinct population segments (Mexico and Central America). Concurrently, launch a "Gold Standard" science review of entanglement risk models for the Dungeness crab fishery and clarify the regulatory scope of the West Coast Take Reduction Team.

Smalltooth Sawfish, Giant Manta Rays, and the Shrimp Fishery

Gather empirical data as part of a stakeholder driven process to inform any new Biological Opinion on the potential impact of the shrimp fishery on smalltooth sawfish and giant manta rays.

Turtle Excluder Devices

Review and revise turtle excluder device regulations, if appropriate, to incorporate vessel-size exemptions and regional flexibility, particularly in the Gulf of America, conserving sea turtles while ensuring operational practicability and safety for small-vessel fleets.

Marine Mammal Protection Act Section 120 Flexibilities

Work with Congress to provide greater flexibility for the removal of sea lions under Section 120 for managers to further the goal of rebuilding fisheries and supporting the long term

sustainability of fishing communities.

Pacific Northwest Salmon Management

Work with the Council and others with the goal to extend fishing opportunities into 2027 and beyond. Optimize opportunities for salmon fishing by applying the new Endangered Species Act reforms (i.e., Section 4, Section 7, and the Definition of "Harm") and review survey requirements to increase the accuracy and reliability of salmon stock assessments. Ensure accurate assessment of catch and bycatch.

Transforming Fisheries Science through Cooperative Partnerships, Innovative Technologies, and Data Pipelines

Cooperative Research Frameworks

Develop a cooperative research strategy that establishes regional frameworks co-designed with active fishermen through research and stock assessment phases (from hypothesis generation through completion, consistent with widely-accepted best practices). Hold regional cooperative research summits to identify regional and national opportunities.

Electronic Monitoring

Working with regional fisheries partners and industry, finalize a national Electronic Technologies roadmap, pilot satellite communication for secure data transfer, and integrate AI and machine learning to automate electronic monitoring workflows.

Recreational Angler Partnership Improvement Directive (RAPID)

Remodel marine recreational catch estimates by co-designing shared-governance data collection frameworks directly with state agencies to replace legacy Marine Recreational Information Program structures.

South Atlantic Red Snapper Exempted Fishing Permits and Discard Accounting

Coordinate with South Atlantic states and the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council to implement state-managed exempted fishing permits, which will allow for more accurate red snapper discard accounting in the South Atlantic and provide better data to inform future stock assessments and management decisions.

Prioritize South Atlantic Red Snapper in SouthEast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR)

Use the results from SEDAR 90 South Atlantic Red Snapper to ensure catch limits are based on current, robust science. Ensure the SEDAR process considers the results from the South Atlantic Red Snapper Research Program.

Centralized Recreational Data Repository and Big Data Analytics

Deploy a centralized, cloud-native repository capable of ingesting diverse, raw data streams (state surveys, cooperative research, angler apps) in their native formats for big data analysis.

Depredation Behavioral Research

Partner with recreational and for-hire anglers to deploy acoustic tagging for mobile data collection (e.g., SciFish) in the Gulf of America to determine residency versus transiency of sandbar sharks, a common depredation species, and isolate attractant stimuli (e.g., vessel acoustics, catch release).

Advanced 'Omics and UxS Deployment

Deploy next-generation uncrewed systems (BVLOS drones, USVs, LRAUVs) alongside operational eDNA studies, production-level epigenetic aging, and close-kin mark-recapture, as well as partnering with fishing industry participants on advancing genomics, to increase data acquired and decrease processing and analytical time in order to move data quickly from platforms to managers and decision makers.

Asset Review, Cataloging, and Access Database for the Enterprise (ARCADE) Implementation and Pipeline Modernization

Refine and modernize data pipelines by standardizing data management practices, refining mission requirements, implementing the Asset Review, Cataloging, and Access Database for the Enterprise system to automate data cataloging and developing centralized cloud-based databases to improve the integration and efficiency of fishery survey data.

Cloud Excellence and AI Integration

Modernize cloud infrastructure and AI integration by establishing a central processing hub, embedding data scientists within survey teams to automate workflows, and leveraging AI and machine learning to streamline species identification, impute missing survey data, and ensure scientific outputs are AI-ready and compliant with federal mandates.

Monuments and Spatial Access

Marine Monument Rulemaking

Expedite rulemaking to remove monument-based commercial fishing prohibitions under Magnuson-Stevens Act across multiple Pacific marine monuments (including Mariana Trench, Papahānaumokuākea, Rose Atoll, and Pacific Remote Islands) in accordance with presidential proclamations.

Spatial Inventory of Key Fishing Grounds

In coordination with partners and working closely with active fishermen, map domestic fishing grounds utilizing historical catch data, vessel monitoring systems, automatic identification systems, and industry information as most appropriate by fishery.

Updating National Standards and Regulatory Reform

Reforming Endangered Species Act Section 4, Section 7, and the Definition of "Harm"

Reform Endangered Species Act processes by finalizing joint rules with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on Section 4 and Section 7. Work with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Office of Management and Budget to expand economic impact analyses for critical habitat designations specifically focusing on any downstream economic impacts on commercial fishing and other maritime activities stemming from the designation. Streamline Section 7 interagency consultations to eliminate bureaucratic backlogs that delay fishery management plans and fleet operations through stricter timelines, limiting the use of overly conservative “worst-case scenario” assumptions and prioritizing empirical, consistent data in biological opinions.

National Standard 1: Optimization for Optimum Yield

In close coordination with regional fishery management councils, fully utilize existing flexibilities to improve catch limit utilization by increasing use of carryover or other flexibilities and providing technical guidance to prevent unnecessary fishery closures, while evaluating whether National Standard 1 guidelines should be amended or supplemented.

National Standard 2: Integration

Establish protocols for integrating industry-collected data into stock assessments while exploring how to better incorporate social and economic expertise from fishing partnerships, including leveraging commercial vessels as scientific platforms and fishermen as science partners) into its decision-making processes under the Magnuson-Stevens Act.

National Standard 8: Sustaining Fishing Communities

Explore reducing burdens on small boat operations, ensuring that impact assessments prioritize the economic viability of working waterfronts and domestic fleets.

National Standard 9: Bycatch Management

Prioritize the development of guidance for adaptive, data-driven bycatch management tools—such as real-time avoidance networks and dynamic spatial management—as alternatives to static closures, while considering potential amendments to National Standard 9 guidelines.

National Standards and Recreational Fishing

Review the National Standard Guidelines to ensure they fully and appropriately account for the unique biological, economic, and social characteristics of recreational fisheries.

Essential Fish Habitat Practicability Application

NOAA Fisheries will not implement regulatory measures based solely on Habitat Areas of Particular Concern designations and instead apply the “Essential Fish Habitat practicability” standard to ensure protections are balanced with economic interests.

Enhancing Competitiveness and Financial Relief

Fishery Finance Program Review

Review internal Fishery Finance Program authorities to deploy loan refinancing, deferred payments, and principal reductions for distressed sectors, such as the West Coast trawl fleet.

Capital Construction Fund

Explore modernizing support mechanisms to address supply chain risks and capitalize the upgrading of aging domestic fleets and obsolete gear.

Disaster Relief

Conduct a comprehensive review of the Magnuson-Stevens Act disaster determination and funding process and explore pathways to expand access to existing government market and disaster support mechanisms.

Seafood Import Monitoring Program Reform

Comprehensive Effectiveness Evaluation

Review Seafood Import Monitoring Program requirements to optimize illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing reduction goals through technological modernization and risk-based screening, while hosting industry sessions to identify and mitigate operational and administrative burdens.

Line-by-Line Data Field Audit

Eliminate any mandated Seafood Import Monitoring Program data fields that lack active operational use cases for illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing detection or targeted audits.

Automated Trade Screening

Deploy AI and automated screening algorithms within the Global Seafood Data System to flag anomalies and upgrade the International Fisheries Trade Permit system to prioritize user experience, expedite approvals, and minimize industry downtime.

Moving Forward Together

Executing these internal reforms and external actions requires cultural and operational dedication from every program office, science center, and regional team within NOAA Fisheries. Our mandate is clear: We must regulate only where necessary, innovate where possible, and always evaluate our work by the real-world economic and conservation results we deliver to the American public.

As I have told our fishermen and council members across the country, "I will be back, and I want to come back with good news." These actions represent that commitment in practice

—cutting bureaucracy, modernizing our science, and putting our fishing communities first. I look forward to working alongside our agency leadership and staff to carry out these reforms and ensure American fisheries remain the gold standard of the world.

Sincerely,

Eugenio Piñeiro Soler

Assistant Administrator, NOAA Fisheries

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[Office of Communications](#)
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