SUSTAINABLE U.S. SEAFOOD:

A JOURNEY FROM SEA TO MARKET

Go on a journey with NOAA Fisheries Service in this five-part series to learn about the complex process and the people involved in getting safe and sustainable seafood to your dinner plate.

Yesterday we learned about the importance of understanding what supports a healthy fish population. Making sure there are enough fish for a healthy ocean ecosystem and enough catch for food is a tall order. Fortunately, NOAA Fisheries Service doesn't do this alone—they work with scientists, fishermen, resource managers, tribes and citizens to manage marine fish for the benefit of everyone, both now and into the future. Today let's find out how scientific information is used to manage fisheries.

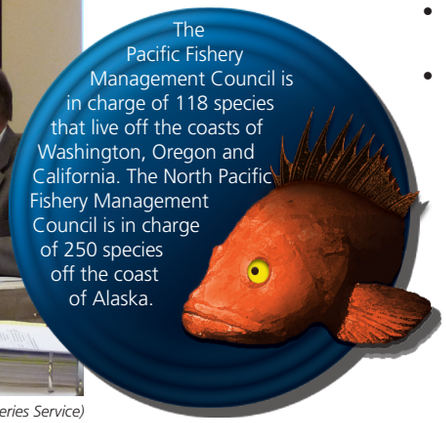
Roadmap to Sustainable Fisheries

NOAA Fisheries Service is the government agency responsible for managing all marine fish that live from three miles to 200 miles off the U.S. coast. (Don't worry, other agencies are keeping an eye on the rest.) The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act is the law governing our nation's marine fisheries. This law requires NOAA Fisheries Service to prevent or end overfishing by limiting the amount of fish we harvest. It also created eight regional fishery management councils to help NOAA Fisheries Service develop the rules for fishing in U.S. waters.

Who is involved in managing our fisheries?

Fishery Management Councils are in charge of making recommendations to NOAA Fisheries Service about how to manage all fish in their geographic region. By working closely with folks from NOAA, tribes, state agencies, fishermen and citizens like you, the Councils make sure that everyone has a voice in figuring out what will work best for their fishery. The Council uses the information in the stock assessments that the scientists, economists and other specialists create to make their informed decisions. Collaboration is key for this crew!

Pacific Fishery Management Council meeting (Photo: NOAA Fisheries Service)



How many fish can be harvested?

After reviewing the information found in the stock assessments for each species or species group and discussing the available management tools, the Council makes a recommendation on annual catch limits and methods to regulate the fishery to NOAA Fisheries Service. NOAA Fisheries Service then makes the final regulatory action, which is what tells people how many fish they can catch, as well as where, when and how they can catch them. NOAA Fisheries Service, the U.S. Coast Guard and state agencies make sure these rules are followed. They can give warnings, issue fines, take away fishing permits or even confiscate a fisherman's catch.

A Fishery Manager's Toolbox

Imagine if everyone could fish all they want with no limits and without any knowledge of how much anyone else is also fishing in the same area. Eventually, we'd run out of fish! Fishery managers use many tools to prevent this from happening:

- **Annual catch limit** – Sets the maximum number of fish that fishermen can catch in a year. Sometimes the total catch is divided up among individual fishermen. (See "What Are Catch Shares?")
- **Fishing trip limits** – Limit the number of times a fisherman can go out to sea
- **Fish size limits** – Require fisherman to only catch fish of a certain size
- **Fishing gear restrictions** – Prohibit the use of some types of fishing gear
- **Area closures** – Make it illegal to fish in some parts of the ocean
- **Seasonal Closures** – Specify days/months when fishing is not allowed

What Are Catch Shares?

Fishermen in a catch share program receive a fixed share (2–3%) of the total groundfish annual catch limit (measured in pounds of fish landed). Unlike the traditional method of regulating fishing in which all fishermen work during a given season, hurrying to catch as much as possible before a specific amount of fish is caught, this system is designed to benefit both the fish and the fisherman because it allows fishermen to work when the seas are not stormy and when fishing is profitable, and it allows them to plan for the future. In Alaska, this method of managing the quota has been successfully used in the sablefish, halibut and pollock fisheries.

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