



**NOAA  
FISHERIES**

# U.S. Fisheries Management: Sustainable Fisheries, Sustainable Seafood



U.S. fisheries are among the world's most sustainable. They are a global model of success in responsible management, and U.S. success directly influences international standards and practices. With world class science and as a strong partner in international efforts for sustainable fisheries, NOAA Fisheries is recognized as a global authority in fisheries management. U.S. fisheries are the largest in the world—covering 4.4 million square miles. And, in that vast area, the U.S. manages every kind of fishery and ecosystem, from Arctic to Caribbean, industrial to subsistence, to coastal and international.

## For more information

**NOAA Fisheries**  
[www.fisheries.noaa.gov](http://www.fisheries.noaa.gov)

**Status of U.S. Fisheries**  
[www.fisheries.noaa.gov/sfa/fisheries\\_eco/status\\_of\\_fisheries](http://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/sfa/fisheries_eco/status_of_fisheries)

**National Standard Guidelines**  
[www.fisheries.noaa.gov/sfa/laws\\_policies/national\\_standards](http://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/sfa/laws_policies/national_standards)

**FishWatch**  
[www.fishwatch.gov](http://www.fishwatch.gov)

Fisheries management in the United States has been a long journey of investment and sacrifice to achieve fisheries that are both biologically sustainable and economically important to the United States. Federal marine fisheries in the United States are governed under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and a number of other important laws, including the Marine Mammal Protection Act, Endangered Species Act, and National Environmental Policy Act.

The U.S. science-based management system has evolved over time into a verifiable, transparent process that strives for continuous improvement. The management system is designed to prevent overfishing, quickly stop overfishing when it occurs, rebuild overfished stocks, and provide significant economic benefit and fishing opportunities for commercial, recreational, and subsistence fishermen.

While we have made significant progress over the last forty years, we must look forward and continue to work on bycatch, climate change, electronic monitoring/electronic reporting, and ecosystem-based fishery management. Expanding marine aquaculture production in the United States is also key for continuing sustainable fisheries into the future. It creates jobs, supports resilient working waterfronts and coastal communities, provides international trade opportunities, and increases our domestic seafood supply.

## Evolution of U.S. Fisheries Management

### 1976 – Fisheries Conservation and Management Act

- Established 200 mile fishery conservation zone.
- Established eight regional fishery management councils.
- Established initial seven National Standards—principles that promote sustainable fisheries management and serve as a standard against which fishery management plans are held.

### 1996 – Sustainable Fisheries Act

- Strengthened requirements to prevent overfishing and rebuild stocks.
- Set standards for fishery management plans to specific objective and measurable criteria for determining stock status.
- Added three new National Standards to address fishing vessel safety, fishing communities, and bycatch.
- Introduced fish habitat as key component in fisheries management.

### 2007 – Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act

- Established annual catch limits and accountability measures.
- Strengthened the role of science through peer review, Scientific and Statistical Committees, and the Marine Recreational Information Program.
- Enhanced international cooperation by addressing illegal, unregulated, and unreported fishing and bycatch.

## Three Pillars of Implementation

Fisheries management in the United States is based on three pillars of implementation:

**Science** – NOAA Fisheries' world-class science includes a transparent and rigorous peer review process, and our science is responsive to new technologies and scientific methods. The science guides fisheries management, providing fishery managers with the information necessary to manage the long-term sustainability of U.S. fisheries.

**Management** – The management process, done in coordination with the eight regional fishery management councils, is public, transparent, and science-based. It ensures continuous improvement of fishery management plans in response to new information and new ideas for how to sustainably manage U.S. fisheries.

**Enforcement** – Enforcement is a key component of U.S. fisheries management, helping ensure compliance with all applicable laws and accountability to the resource and the economies and communities that rely on it.

## Status of U.S. Stocks

Over time, NOAA Fisheries continues to make progress ending overfishing and rebuilding our nation's fish stocks. As of the end of 2016, 84 percent of stocks with a known status were not overfished and 91 percent were not subject to overfishing. Additionally, 41 stocks have been declared rebuilt since 2000.

By ending overfishing and rebuilding stocks, we are strengthening the value of fisheries to the economy, communities, and marine ecosystems. To sustain this progress, we must continue to ensure solid, science-based determinations of stock status and better linkages to biological, socioeconomic, and ecosystem conditions. It is also increasingly important that we better understand ecosystem and habitat factors, as resilient ecosystems and habitat form the foundation for robust fisheries and fishing jobs.

## Sustainability Assessment of U.S. Fisheries

In 2016, NOAA Fisheries announced the publication of a peer-reviewed self-assessment that shows the standards of the United States fishery management system under the Magnuson-Stevens Act more than meet the criteria of the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization's ecolabelling guidelines. These same guidelines serve as a basis for many consumer seafood certification and ranking schemes. The assessment demonstrates that the U.S. fisheries management system is particularly strong when considering responsiveness and science-based criteria. Beyond the biological and ecosystem criteria, the assessment also pointed out that the U.S. system incorporates the social and economic components of fisheries essential for effective long-term stewardship.

### Fish Stock Sustainability Index

NOAA Fisheries measures the performance of U.S. fisheries through the Fish Stock Sustainability Index (FSSI), which includes important commercial and recreational fish stocks that represent 85 percent of total U.S. landings. The FSSI increases as NOAA Fisheries determines the status of a stock and when a stock's status improves (either no longer subject to overfishing, no longer overfished, or rebuilt). Since 2000, increases in the FSSI show significant progress in sustainably managing U.S. fisheries.