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Fishery Reports Highlight Progress

In the most recent Report to Congress on the Status of US Fisheries issued in May 2004 (www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/reports.html), NOAA Fisheries announced that the general biological trend for the status of US stocks continues to be positive. Of the 894 federally managed fish stocks, only 8.5% are classified as overfished and 6.7% are experiencing overfishing.

In 2003, overfishing was stopped on spiny dogfish, summer flounder, South Atlantic yellowtail snapper, North Atlantic swordfish, and blacktip shark. The total number of stocks subject to overfishing declined from 66 to 60 in 2003 continuing a gradual, but overall positive trend from 1997 when there were 91 stocks subject to overfishing.

In 2003, ten species were taken off the list of overfished stocks. These include North Atlantic swordfish, Pollock, summer flounder, monkfish, red grouper, blacktip shark, sandbar shark, South Atlantic yellowtail snapper, blue king crab and tanner crab.

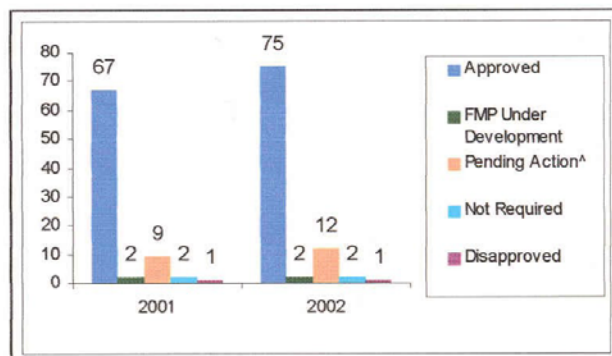


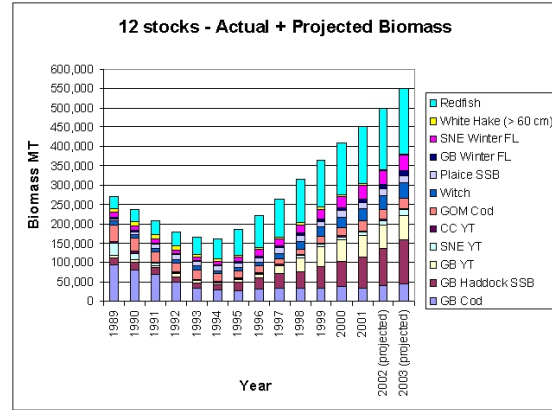
Figure 5. Status of rebuilding plans for overfished stocks, 2001-2002.
[^] Under development or not yet submitted.

Since 1997, the number of overfished stocks has declined from 106 to 76 stocks. These stocks are being managed under recovery programs, which limit fishing activities to allow for stock rebuilding and some economic stability for local fishing communities. Rebuilding programs are in place for almost all overfished stocks. By 2002, a total of 75 rebuilding plans were in place with the remaining few in development.

There are many stocks for which NOAA has no status information. NOAA reports it does not assess the status of many stocks because they are not targeted in fisheries and have a low probability of becoming overfished. The status of these stocks is listed as “unknown” because NOAA has not collected sufficient information to conduct assessments and make status determinations.

In 2003 NOAA reviewed 909 stocks, but focus the majority of its resources on 267 major stocks, those with landings over 200,000 pounds, which account 99.9% of landings. *Highlights on the status of some individual stocks follow.*

Atlantic Groundfish – The spawning stock biomass for Georges Bank cod, haddock, yellowtail and winter flounder have increased since 1995 while the exploitation rate has been dramatically lowered through fishery regulations. The NMFS Spring stock surveys show a dramatic increase in haddock, yellowtail and cod. The total stock biomass of 11 multi-species stocks tracked in New England has returned to 1989 levels from a low in 1994. During the past two Gulf of Maine fishing seasons, inshore fishermen have had their best summer seasons in a decade and now complain about the over abundance of cod of all sizes, restrictions that limit landings, and problems of staying away from cod in other fisheries.



Atlantic Swordfish – Contrary to seafood guide summaries, the biomass of North Atlantic swordfish is increasing as a result of ICCAT management action taken back in 1997 prior to the “Give Swordfish A Break” campaign.

“The management actions taken by the Commission in 1997 to 1999 clearly demonstrate the resilience of swordfish, and the responsiveness of the stock to a decrease in fishing mortality. With just two years of management under the strict quota scenario, there are positive signs from the fishery in terms of catch rates” (ICCAT SCRS Swordfish Species Group 1999).

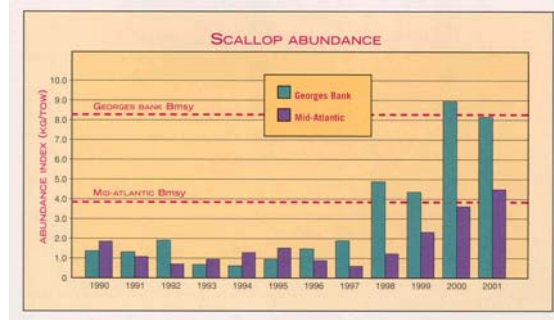
Calls for consumer avoidance of North Atlantic swordfish in the past were based on claims that the average size of swordfish declined from 266 pounds in the 1960s to 90 pounds in the 1990s, and suggested that the size of breeding stock was too small. The difference in average size caught is actually due to gear used and still exists today. The harpoon catch, which dominated in the 1960s targeted large females that bask on the surface. Longlines, which entered the fishery later are fished across age and size groups. Harpoon data show the average size of harpoon catch at 230 pounds (1998), while 1999 average longline catch is at 99.8 pounds.



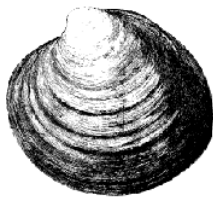
The management regulations from the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) instituted before the swordfish campaign began have protected the spawning stock and produced positive increases in North Atlantic swordfish, thus calling into question the value of consumer boycotts that only appear to have generated negative economic impacts for U.S. fishermen and confusion in the market with little conservation benefit.

Atlantic Scallops – Atlantic scallops are not overfished as reported in the seafood guides, but abundant in record sizes and show cased as a success story in the NOAA Fisheries management presentations. According to NMFS spokesperson, Teri Frady, “These are scallops that fishery management made.”

While stories of huge and plentiful scallops circulated around the fleet for some time, findings were not confirmed until 1998 when scientists surveying closed grounds found 70 million pounds on the ocean floor prompting a reopening in 1999. New underwater video survey technology introduced under the leadership of Dr. Brian Rothschild at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth’s Center for Marine Science and Technology dramatically improved scallop stock assessments and led to the reassessment of the fishery.



Surf Clams and Ocean Quahogs – These Atlantic fisheries have been producing meat for the chowder and clam market for fifty years and since 1987 have operated under an individual transferable quota (ITQ) management system. Neither fishery is overfished and their long history of productivity suggests that bottom gear used such as hydrolic dredges to harvest these resources can be fished sustainably without harming the productivity of the resource.



Wild Shrimp

Shrimp stocks in the Southeastern United States and Gulf of Mexico are stable producing consistent annual yields. Bycatch of sea turtles and other species such as red snapper have been reduced by the use of turtle excluder devises (TEDs) and bycatch reduction devises (BRDs) in the southeastern and gulf shrimp fisheries. All wild shrimp imported into the United States is required to have been harvested by vessels with TEDs. This requirement is certified through annual State Department inspections in shrimp exporting countries. The domestic TED and BRD requirements are enforced by the U.S. Coast Guard and state enforcement agencies. The Coast Guard reports consistent high compliance rates near 100%. Endangered sea turtle populations are recovering at exponential rates due to protection of nesting sites in the Gulf of Mexico. The use of TEDs has helped accelerate sea turtle recovery. The U.S. and Mexican shrimp industry have been active partners in the bilateral sea turtle recovery program contributing funds, equipment, transportation and labor to help restore these endangered species.



Red Snapper

NMFS data show that the index of abundance for red snapper has been increasing since 1993 and is approaching historic levels that were common in the late 1970's. Catch per unit of effort for both recreational and commercial quotas have increased as well providing another indication that stock abundance is building. Recreational and commercial observations of the growth in the stock have finally been confirmed by NMFS, which reported red snapper as "Good News" in 2000 as showing signs of rebuilding.

Farmed Shrimp

Farmed shrimp production in the United States is strictly regulated under federal and state statutes. Criteria for effluent discharges are strict and permits undergo extensive public review that has led to limited discharges and semi-enclosed circulatory systems where needed. Water conservation standards exist in many of the shrimp producing nations around the world enforced by national courts as noted in one of the seafood purchasing guides. Mangrove protection laws exist in all of the major shrimp producing nations. On a global basis, shrimp aquaculture is a minor contributor to mangrove alteration (from 4% – 10%) and where mangrove conversions to shrimp ponds did occur farmers have found that the acidic mangrove soil structure is unsuitable for shrimp cultivation. Many shrimp farmers have saved mangrove areas to act as barriers against storm surges and nature filters to maintain water quality. Ocean Trust is working with farmers to establish private mangrove reserves and to develop methodologies for the reintroduction and use of mangroves as biofilters for pond effluent.

Pacific Groundfish

Pacific groundfish are a complex of closely related species found primarily in the eastern Pacific with about 82 species distributed from the Gulf of California to the Bering Sea. Stock assessments indicate that some groundfish stocks (rockfish) off the west coast have declined sharply while other rockfish populations are doing fine. Nine stocks were found to be below the overfished threshold during 199-2002. The assessments cover only a few of the species and occur on three-year cycles. The infrequency and lack of species inclusiveness in survey has led to statistical uncertainty of assessments and conservative management quotas in accordance with precautionary principles of management. As a result, quotas for some species like canary rockfish have been cut by 90 percent.

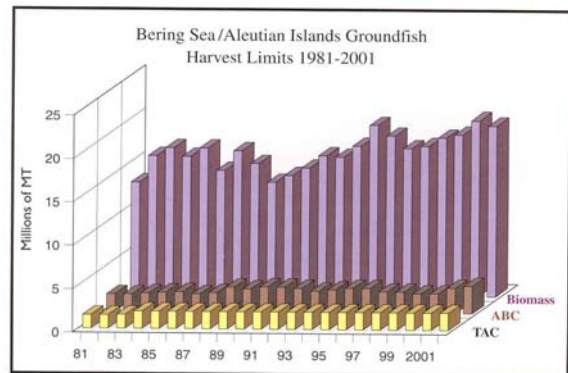
Assessments of the Canadian and Alaskan rockfish stocks (Gulf of Alaska-GOA, Aleutian Island-AI and Eastern Bering Sea-EBS) occur on a more consistent basis and show more stable conditions. Pacific Ocean Perch, the dominant species of red rockfish, is



represented by five stocks as follows: West Coast, Goose Island Gully, Gulf of Alaska, Aleutian Islands, and Eastern Bering Sea. All were severely overfished by distant water fleets in the 1960's and 1970's. Pacific Ocean Perch stocks toward the center of its distribution have rebuilt strongly and are no longer overfished (GOA, AI, EBS) while stocks at the southern limit of distribution have been slow to rebuild.

Bering Sea/Aleutian Island Groundfish

Over half of the US landed products comes from Alaska fisheries in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands of which groundfish is the single largest component. No groundfish stocks from the North Pacific and Alaska fisheries are considered overfished. Pollock biomass is near all time high levels with 2002 overfishing level of 3.54 million metric tons, an acceptable biological catch (ABC) level of 2.1 million metric tons and the total allowable catch (TAC) set conservatively at 1.5 million



metric tons leaving an estimated 22 billion pounds of Pollock swimming in US waters off Alaska. Critical habitat areas have been established to protect Steller sea lions and bycatch of prohibited species in the Bering Sea trawl fisheries such as halibut, salmon, herring and crab average less than 1% of the biomass of these species. Waste of salmon and halibut bycatch also has been reduced by allowing bycatch to be donated to food banks.

Chilean Sea Bass (Patagonian Toothfish)

Illegal and unregulated fishing for Patagonian toothfish outside of the quotas and regulations established the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) led to the adoption of a Catch Documentation Scheme (CDS) to track and monitor the harvest and trade of Patagonian and Antarctic toothfish. The CDS program requires that all landings, transshipments, and importation of toothfish into CCAMLR member countries like the United States be accompanied by a catch tracking document in order to monitor international trade, identify the origins of imports, and determine if imports were caught consistent with CCAMLR conservation measures.

NMFS instituted the program in the U.S. in May of 2000 to discourage unlawful harvests and give "U.S. consumers confidence that the seafood they eat is legally and sustainably caught" (NMFS 2000). All Chilean sea bass imported into the United States is monitored by NMFS and requires special permits to import this species. The CCAMLR has adopted flag state licensing measures for fishing vessels, annual catch quotas, vessel monitoring systems, and identification of fishing gear to further control the management of toothfish.

