



The NCMC

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Inside this issue:

- Ocean View - 2020 Vision: The Fall of the Wild? 2
- Top 10 of the First 10 3
- ICCAT 2010: Bluefin Recovery is Left Waiting at the Dock 6
- Obama Signs Shark Conservation Act 7
- NCMC Releases Report on Preserving Northeast Forage Base 8

The National Coalition for Marine Conservation was started in 1973 by sport fishermen. Like the sportsmen before them who pioneered wildlife conservation on land, they evolved, naturally, into passionate protectors of fish and the wild world we share. Fish are wild animals and they need wild places.

Nearly four decades later, NCMC remains dedicated to keeping the ocean wild to preserve fishing opportunities for the future. That means always putting the resource first, while proving to the non-fishing public, through actions not rhetoric, that what's good for the individual angler is good for us all because, as one of our founding directors used to say, "The quality of fishing reflects the quality of living."

We begin 2011 with new leadership. Long-time chair Christopher M. Weld is stepping down, handing the reins to Arthur B. "Tim" Choate. Chris, a co-founder of NCMC, gave the organization its winning philosophy: keep conservation the #1 goal; stay lean and mean; work with other fishing and environmental groups whenever possible; choose issues that establish precedent and principle; and remember that what matters most is making a difference, not who gets credit.

Tim is a passionate angler from Coral Gables, Florida who's fished the world over. He joined our board in the 1980s. He's committed to NCMC, he says, because "I believe that conservation is a gift to my children and to theirs." The future of ocean fishing again. That's why we're here.

THE BIG PICTURE

But the challenges ahead are daunting. Where will we fit in the future, if the only truly wild places are locked away in marine parks, surrounded by a network of fish farms and other industrial uses? If fishing down the food web - overfishing large predators and their prey - irreversibly alters marine ecosystems? Is this the future we want for our oceans?

No. That's why in 2011 our goals are part of an ecosystems approach to marine conservation, which to us means, quite simply, seeing the big picture. Take the narrow view - focus on a single species or fishery in isolation from everything else - and the entire landscape will change before you realize it.

To protect top predators, we'll be working this year to remove billfish from the commercial market, through education and legislation. We'll reduce longline bycatch of breeding bluefin in the Gulf of Mexico, encouraging more selective fishing to benefit all big fish. We will continue to change the way we manage fisheries for key prey species - menhaden, the herrings, sardine - to preserve the ocean's forage base, the foundation of all life higher up on the food chain. We will ensure that marine aquaculture takes pressure off wild fisheries and doesn't place increased demands on an already-stressed environment.

Each of these projects and others provide us an opportunity to score a long-lasting victory - for the fish, the ecosystems they are a part of, and the future of sustainable fishing. In 2011, that's still what it's all about. □



Plus:

See pages 4-5 for our 2010 Financial Summary and Honor Roll.

• Check out page 7 for a new column on NCMC's recent travels.

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2020 VISION: The Fall of the Wild?

Breakthrough in Breeding Bluefin Tuna; European Research Project Promotes "Self-Sustained Aquaculture and Domestication"

I am sorry to say," John Kennedy once said anyway, "there is too much point to the wise crack that life is extinct on other planets because their scientists were more advanced than ours."

Science can enhance our understanding and appreciation of the natural world. Science can help us engineer more efficient (i.e., conservative) ways of fishing. It is a delusion, however, to assume that science – in this case, that of breeding and raising ocean fish in captivity – will somehow vastly increase seafood production and save wild fisheries at the same time. In fact, it could very well hasten their demise.

The ocean has reached its carrying capacity, surpassing its ability to supply wild-caught seafood. We may be able, through new technologies, to extract more fish protein from the sea by farming it. But as on land, large-scale farming of ocean fish will come at a cost – the wide-scale loss of wild areas and the disappearance of species.

Does that mean we shouldn't farm the seas? Alas, that horse has already bolted from the barn. Half the world's seafood harvest now comes from fish farms. Aquaculture is expected to be one of the top growth industries in the United States over the next decade. It's already the fastest growing segment of our agriculture industry, mostly in supplying aquafeeds for the world market, including fish meal and fish oil made from small pelagic "forage fish" like menhaden, herring and sardine.

EYES WIDE SHUT

Our fisheries agency, NOAA, is currently drafting a policy to guide development of aquaculture in U.S. offshore waters. A November 2010 study prepared jointly by NOAA and the Department of Agriculture, *The Future of Aquafeeds*, concurs with one of our chief concerns about farming, its impact on wild forage populations.

The report affirms that: forage fish are important to marine ecosystems; increased demand could lead to overexploitation with negative consequences for the environment; conventional management policies do not adequately consider the needs of predatory fish, marine mammals and birds; in fact, current catches may be further reduced "to leave a greater supply of forage fish" to meet predator needs.

Research into alternative, non-fish based feeds is commendable. But NOAA must also demand changes in management of forage fish, including the adoption of more conservative abundance targets and overfishing thresholds, something we've consistently urged the agency to do.

In the end, science does not change our needs, it only empowers them. Advances in technology always have been, and always will be, used to serve human desires. It is these desires that will determine how we use new farming technologies and what, if any, restraint we show toward wild fish stocks because of it.

So let's keep our eyes wide open and acknowledge that aquaculture in no way solves the problem of harvesting seafood sustainably. In fact, the problem hasn't changed at all. It is still one of controlling human behavior, and there is little reason to think that behavior will change without strict environmental safeguards to protect wild fisheries.

-Ken Hinman, *President*

NATIONAL COALITION FOR MARINE CONSERVATION

Founded in 1973

The NCMC is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to the following goals:

- ◆ preventing overfishing and restoring depleted fish populations to healthy levels
- ◆ promoting sustainable use policies that balance commercial, recreational and ecological values
- ◆ modifying or eliminating wasteful fishing practices
- ◆ improving our understanding of fish and their role in the marine environment
- ◆ preserving coastal habitat and water quality.

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TOP 10 OF THE FIRST 10

What events of the first decade of the 21st Century stand out as most noteworthy? Here's our top 10 list, in no particular order, singling out those events whose impact promises to extend well into the next decade.

- ⑩ **Endangered Bluefin.** The giant bluefin tuna is a global icon because it's a big, beautiful fish with a high price on its head; a victim of greed, plain and simple. A 2009-10 campaign to halt international trade in Atlantic bluefin failed, but it so scared the world's fishing nations they cut their catch by a third, added more protections for spawning fish, and enacted strict new enforcement measures. The CITES effort saved a lot of tuna that would have otherwise died, and that just may be what keeps the species around until the cavalry arrives.
- ⑩ **The Gulf Oil Spill.** The oil may have disappeared from the news, but rest assured it's still there, working its way through the food chain and, if past spills of this magnitude teach us anything, altering marine life in ways we probably won't understand for years. The future of offshore oil drilling is also uncertain.
- ⑩ **No-Longline Zones.** By our estimation, the 2000/1 decision to kick indiscriminate longlines out of large areas off the southeast coast and in the eastern gulf has so far saved tens of thousands of Atlantic billfish and sharks and hundreds of thousands of juvenile swordfish, greatly aiding the latter's recovery. The 2004 decision to bar longlines from the west coast is reaping similar benefits there.
- ⑩ **Climate Change.** People can argue all they want about global warming and who's responsible and what to do about it, but it's coming. Fishermen are already seeing fish populations shift northward out of their historical range, while other species are moving in. The warming of the seas will promote some species and undermine others. So will the related threat of ocean acidification. High levels of CO₂ could wipe out corals and shell-bearing species, including tiny planktons at the bottom of the food chain.
- ⑩ **An End to Overfishing.** The 2006 Magnuson-Stevens Reauthorization Act forced fishery managers to set science-based catch limits and end overfishing by 2010-11. Despite a few detours and bumps in the road, we may be on track to halt declines in all fisheries this year. Now we need to stay the course through rebuilding all fisheries, which means defeating attempts to weaken the Act.
- ⑩ **The Advent of Open Ocean Aquaculture.** The move away from fishing towards farming the sea could be a turning point in how people obtain seafood, with strict environmental standards in place to protect wild fisheries. Or, it could be the "tipping point," a term used in epidemiology to mark the point when an infectious disease goes beyond our ability to control it from spreading more widely.
- ⑩ **The Deficit.** With a federal deficit that's now reached \$1.5 trillion, spending for fisheries won't be rising any time soon; indeed, fisheries agencies will have to learn to make do with less. But failures in management are as much due to timid leadership, lack of vision and an inability to set priorities as to a lack of funds. Tough decisions will have to be made: on new sources of funding from the fisheries themselves; and most importantly, whether we can really afford a management system that seeks to maximize yields to all fisheries, thereby maximizing costs (research, regulation, monitoring and enforcement), or we let moderation be our guide.
- ⑩ **Forage First!** Author Bruce Franklin called menhaden "The Most Important Fish in the Sea" in his 2007 book of the same name. At the time, menhaden and its herring-like relatives were already the object of an emerging movement to protect all "forage fish." Today that movement is national in scope, involving many groups working to protect these fish for their vital role of transferring energy from the bottom of the food chain to top level predators.
- ⑩ **Polarized Politics.** Is there a vast conspiracy among environmentalists and government regulators to put recreational and commercial fishermen out of business? That's what some sport and commercial fishing groups would have you believe. Mimicking what's happening on the national stage, paranoia and polarization are poisoning the well, turning groups that should be united for conservation against each other.
- ⑩ **The Digital Age.** Nothing has changed people's everyday lives over the last 10 years more than the seemingly never-ending advances in digital technology. That goes for people in the fishing industry, NGOs and governments. Now, if we can find a way to put these advances in communication and data management to work for conservation...

ICCAT 2010

BLUEFIN RECOVERY IS LEFT WAITING AT THE DOCK

*Marlin and Swordfish Agreements Extended;
Sharks and Turtles Get New Protections*



NOAA's deputy assistant secretary for international fisheries, Russell Smith III, heads U.S. ICCAT delegation at the meeting in Paris, France. NCMC president Ken Hinman is seated behind and to the right of Mr. Smith. (Photo courtesy of NOAA)

The outcome of the November 17-27, 2010 annual meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas may have been predictable, but things did get off to a rousing start.

The Head Delegate from Libya had come to Paris with a proposal to ban all fishing for bluefin tuna for two years to give the species what he called a “biological rest.” He noted that ICCAT is “in front of the world,” that following the failed attempt to list bluefin as an endangered species at CITES earlier in the year, the ball is back in ICCAT’s court. We must, he said, “send a message to the

world that we deserve management of the stocks.” Then he caught everyone off guard by interrupting discussions of the latest stock assessment and forcing a roll call vote on his proposal.

Vote to replace decades of quota-tinkering to little effect with decisive action that ICCAT’s lead scientist agreed would accelerate rebuilding? You’d think someone had let a skunk into the room. First of all, ICCAT isn’t used to doing much of anything until after a full week of posturing and behind-closed-doors deal-making. Numerous interventions from around the table were clearly meant to forestall a vote, while the chair and executive secretary argued over the correct procedure for conducting it. Many of the delegates were clearly uneasy about letting this go forward. What if...?

Ultimately, the Libyan proposal went down, 11-5, with 4 abstentions, but it was good theatre. The only other drama was provided by Greenpeace that evening, when protesters blockaded a dinner cruise on the River Seine offered to ICCAT delegates. The boat never left the dock, leaving delegates, including some who support a bluefin moratorium, frustrated and unhappy. Bad theatre, but it did provide an apt metaphor for ICCAT’s bluefin recovery program.

STATUS QUO RULES THE DAY

When the ICCAT meeting adjourned on November 27th, the commission opted for token reductions in fishing for bluefin that amount to maintaining the *status quo*. The total allowable catch in the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean was set at 12,900 metric tons, a 4% decrease from the 2010 level of 13,500 tons, set a year ago to avert the endangered listing. In the western Atlantic, where the United States fishes, the quota was reduced 3%, from 1,800 to 1,750 tons.

“Given the scientific advice the commission received this year, which showed very slight improvement in both bluefin stocks since the last assessment in 2008, *status quo* was a predictable outcome,” notes NCMC president Ken Hinman, who served on the U.S. delegation in Paris. “But because of the acknowledged uncertainties surrounding that assessment, coupled with the severely depleted state of the stocks, the National Coalition for Marine Conservation supported far more precautionary catch limits.”

ICCAT extended current conservation agreements for swordfish and blue and white marlin through 2011. “The marlins must await a new stock assessment before ICCAT revises the conservation program,” says Hinman, “but further reductions in the longline fisheries were put on the table this year, and they will be fully considered next year.”

The situation for north Atlantic swordfish, on the other hand, is troublesome. The commission once again postponed decisions about how to allocate the newly rebuilt stock among traditional fishing nations, including the U.S., and developing countries - without overfishing. The allowable catch was kept at 13,700 tons, which gives the stock a 50% chance of staying at a sustainable level, but individual country quotas add up to 15,345 t which, if caught, would put the swordfish catch 10% above the overfishing limit.

Progress was made on less controversial issues, namely shark and sea turtle conservation. ICCAT countries agreed to record and report all fishery interactions with turtles by species and to take measures to avoid them and release them alive if caught accidentally. Landing oceanic whitetip and hammerhead sharks caught in ICCAT fisheries was prohibited, and short-fin mako sharks will benefit from a new agreement that sets the stage for future management, which is important because makos are targeted by ICCAT countries. Countries not submitting data on shark catches will be prohibited from retaining them after 2012, when science-based catch levels will be adopted. □

Postscript: As a blunt reminder of why it is so difficult to lower bluefin quotas, a 754-pound tuna sold at the first Japanese fish auction of 2011 for a record \$396,000, or over \$500 a pound. It’ll be served as sushi to customers in Tokyo and Hong Kong.

NcMC



A log of where we have traveled to fight for the fish in the last quarter...

TRAVELS

- ✦ Executive director Pam Lyons Gromen traveled to **Philadelphia, PA** on October 6th for an informational meeting of the Mid-Atlantic Council's Squid, Mackerel and Butterfish Committee. Committee members heard presentations from shad and river herring experts to assist them in developing ocean bycatch measures.
- ✦ President Ken Hinman, in his capacity as an advisor to the U.S. on international fisheries, attended the ICCAT Advisory Committee, **Silver Spring, MD**, October 18-20 to help develop U.S. positions to conserve tunas, swordfish, billfish and sharks at the annual ICCAT meeting in November.
- ✦ From November 6-7, Pam attended the Pacific Fishery Management Council meeting in **Costa Mesa, CA** and testified in support of accounting for ecological factors when setting catch limits for sardine, Pacific mackerel and other coastal pelagic species.
- ✦ Ken attended the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Annual Meeting in **Charleston, SC**, November 8th, where the Menhaden and River Herring Management Boards made important decisions on strengthening their conservation plans for these key forage fish.
- ✦ On November 9th, Pam met with congressional staff in **Washington, DC** to discuss forage fish standards in offshore aquaculture legislation.
- ✦ Ken went to **Paris, France** November 17-27 as a member of the U.S. Delegation to the 17th Special Meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas to assist the U.S. in advocating for tighter limits on fishing for bluefin tuna and extension of the swordfish and billfish conservation programs (see page 6 for his ICCAT report).
- ✦ On December 13th, Pam participated in the first meeting of the Mid-Atlantic Council's ad-hoc River Herring and Shad Committee held in **Virginia Beach, VA**.
- ✦ Ken and NCMC board chair Tim Choate participated in strategy meetings for the Take Marlin Off the Menu campaign in **Washington, DC**, December 13-14.
- ✦ From January 11-13, Ken traveled to **St. Petersburg, FL** to participate in the ASMFC Menhaden Technical Committee's 3-day workshop on developing new rebuilding targets for menhaden.

OBAMA SIGNS SHARK CONSERVATION ACT

Exemption for Smooth Dogfish Remains a Concern

On January 4th, President Obama signed the Shark Conservation Act into law, significantly strengthening shark conservation both nationally and internationally. The Act, which was first introduced in the House by Congresswoman Madeleine Bordallo (D-Guam) and later in the Senate by Senator John Kerry (D-MA), passed both Houses of Congress on December 21st during the lame duck session.

Shark finning, the practice of cutting off a shark's fins and discarding the mutilated carcass at sea, has been banned in the United States since 2000. However, an unanticipated loophole allowed U.S. flagged vessels to skirt regulations by purchasing fins on the high seas from fishermen engaged in finning. The fins could then be brought back to the U.S. and sold for steep profits.

The Shark Conservation Act closes this loophole. In addition, the Act promotes international shark conservation efforts by allowing sanctions to be imposed on nations that have not implemented shark fishing regulations consistent with those placed on U.S. fishermen.

To win support of North Carolina Senators, the final bill was amended to exempt commercial fishermen who catch smooth dogfish from the requirement to land sharks with their fins

naturally attached. Although the smooth dogfish fishery represents less than 1% of all shark fishing in the U.S. and its territories, the NCMC opposed exempting any



Courtesy NOAA Photo Library

shark fisheries because it could weaken the U.S. position at international fishery management bodies, where we are advocating for stronger rules to prohibit shark finning. "It could encourage other nations to exempt certain shark fisheries for economic reasons," says NCMC president Ken Hinman.

"But while the exemption remains a concern," he says, "the fins-attached requirement will apply to all other shark fisheries and will greatly aid enforcement of the shark finning ban as well as improve the accuracy of shark species identification for stock assessment purposes."

Congratulations to all of our NCMC members who wrote in support of this important legislation! ☐

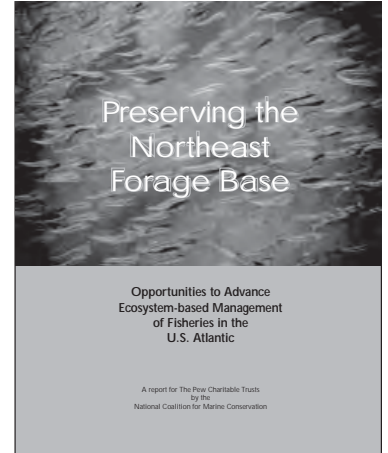


NCMC RELEASES REPORT ON PRESERVING NORTHEAST FORAGE BASE

In December, NCMC released *“Preserving the Northeast Forage Base: Opportunities to Advance Ecosystem-based Management of Fisheries in the U.S. Atlantic.”* Coauthors Ken Hinman and Pam Lyons Gromen present an overview of forage fisheries managed by the New England and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Councils as well as the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. Red flags are raised as to the state of the Northeast forage base as a whole, with declines cited in a number of important forage fish populations, including menhaden, mackerel, sea herring, shad and river herring.

“The long list of predatory fish we are attempting to restore to or sustain at healthy levels includes some of the Northeast’s most valuable commercial and recreational species: Atlantic bluefin tuna, swordfish, white marlin, cod, oceanic sharks, striped bass and summer flounder. As we recover their populations, the demand for prey naturally increases. But the available supply of food - the overall forage base available to them - is dwindling,” says Hinman.

The report expands on recent actions of fishery managers and non-governmental organizations to advance ecosystem-based approaches to forage fish management in the Northeast region. “The ball is starting to move, and we must build on that momentum if we want to see meaningful change,” says Gromen. “Now is the time for the fishing and environmental communities to come together on this issue, and we hope this report assists other groups in evaluating opportunities to become involved.”



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