



## BRINGING BACK THE BIG FISH

### BILLFISH CONSERVATION ACT THE LATEST IN A LONG LIST OF NCMC/WILD OCEANS ACHIEVEMENTS

We've always said that fish are wild creatures as magnificent as any animal on earth. And we've likened the big fish – billfish, tunas and sharks – to the lions, tigers and wolves of the sea. Through the years we've grown in our appreciation for their importance as keystone predators, maintaining balance and diversity in marine ecosystems. But although these big fish have few natural predators, they are among the most vulnerable fish in the sea. Man, after all, is the most dangerous predator of all, limited only by the limits we set for ourselves.



We recognize that fishing in wild oceans, where sharks, marlins and tunas roam, requires us to fish conservatively, to avoid indiscriminate gears that harm other species, and to preserve open-ocean habitat and the prey base they need to survive. For the last 40 years, Wild Oceans (formerly the National Coalition for Marine Conservation or NCMC) has been committed to these goals, a commitment that has produced tangible benefits for the fish and the future of fishing.

Our signature achievement in 2012 was passage of The Billfish Conservation Act, which ends the importation in the United States of an estimated 30,000 marlin a year. But as the following summary makes clear, it is just the latest in a long list of accomplishments. We have initiated and/or been a driving force behind nearly every major U.S. action to protect and restore billfish, actions that in turn have benefited *all* big fish.

### THE BEGINNING (1973-76)

NCMC co-founder Chris Weld fished extensively for swordfish, bluefin tuna, marlin and sailfish. "Swordfishing on Nantucket Shoals and Georges Bank made me aware of the tremendously destructive fishery being prosecuted by foreign vessels and the need to establish a 200-mile-limit," he recalls. "At the time there were no conservation organizations dedicated to fishery issues. Along with Frank Carlton and with the encouragement of others, we incorporated NCMC as a non-profit organization. NCMC's first action was to convene the

organizers of 40 major fishing tournaments to encourage catch-and-release fishing. Our first two programs focused on bluefin tuna conservation and the establishment of a 200-mile-limit. The former got us involved with ICCAT [Frank was one of the first U.S. Commissioners to the International Convention for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas] and the second with the drafting of the original Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976, which established federal authority to manage and conserve the nation's fishery resources."



### **ATLANTIC BILLFISH FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN (1985-1989)**

The federal plan for conserving Atlantic billfish got underway in 1985, as we worked to include as a primary goal maintaining an abundance of blue and white marlin and sailfish for the recreational fishery. The social and economic value of catch-and-release fishing, which far outweighs any commercial value and has a negligible impact on the stock, argued for a unique approach to managing billfish. On top of that, the incidental catch of billfish in expanding U.S. pelagic longline fisheries, along with an emerging commercial market for marlin in the U.S., made a ban on sale of Atlantic billfish a must. NCMC recognized that taking away the incentive to target or land billfish for commerce was the most effective tool then available to conserve these fish. The no-sale billfish plan became law in 1990, helping protect the future of billfishing in the Atlantic.

### **INTERNATIONAL BILLFISH SYMPOSIUM (1987-89)**

The need for greater global cooperation to conserve wide-ranging species of marlin and swordfish, in the face of equally widespread uncertainty as to the health of these fisheries, led us to sponsor an International Billfish Symposium in 1988 in Kona, Hawaii. The historic gathering of the world's foremost billfish authorities attracted 160 scientists, managers, conservationists and fishermen from 15 countries. A total of 60 papers were delivered and discussed during the week-long conference, covering trends in the fisheries, the status of billfish populations, research needs and priorities, and management strategies. The very latest studies by scientists from every corner of the globe were presented. We published the papers and panel discussions the following year, two hardcover volumes that stood for over a decade as the most complete source of information on billfish. For his work in organizing the five-day conference, NCMC's Ken Hinman was awarded The Billfish Foundation's Conservation Award in November 1988.

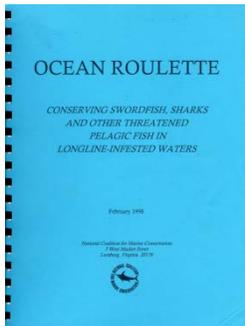


### **AMENDING THE MAGNUSON ACT TO REGULATE TUNA FISHING (1988-90)**

Over our objections, the original Magnuson Act excluded tuna in order to justify U.S. tuna boats invading the waters of other nations. But unregulated fishing for tuna off our shores not only put tuna stocks at risk but also inhibited conservation of other big fish,

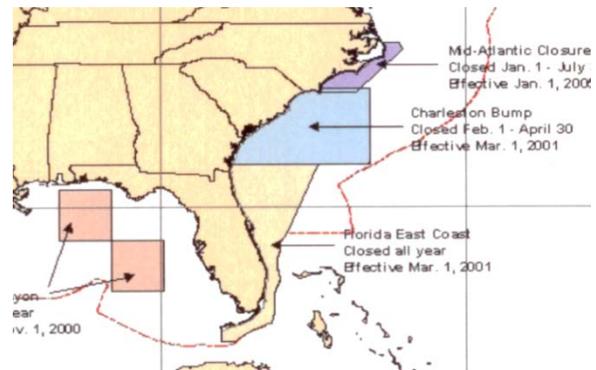
namely billfish, swordfish and sharks, routinely killed in the tuna longline fisheries, whether foreign or our own. NCMC initiated a drive to repeal the tuna exclusion and extend to tuna the same conservation and management benefits afforded all other fisheries under the Act. We testified before Congress and met with staff numerous times. In October 1990, the lawmakers made a dramatic reversal in U.S. policy, giving U.S. managers authority to manage tuna and regulate tuna fishing bycatch.

### **EAST COAST AND GULF LONGLINE CLOSURES TO MINIMIZE BYCATCH (1993-2000),**



In 2000, the National Marine Fisheries Service enacted federal regulations closing 133,000 square miles of U.S. coastal waters to longlining. The chain of events leading to the longline closures can be traced to 1993, when NCMC co-founded the Marine Fish Conservation Network and successfully passed 1996 amendments to the Magnuson Act making bycatch reduction a new mandate. We exhaustively

researched longline controls to minimize bycatch and put forth specific recommendations for closing areas of highest bycatch in our 1998 report, Ocean Roulette. When NMFS failed to act, we sued the agency for violating the law and, in a 1999 settlement, secured large closed areas off the southeast coast and in the Gulf of Mexico, closures that reduced bycatch of billfish by up to 75% and are credited with helping restore swordfish to the east coast.



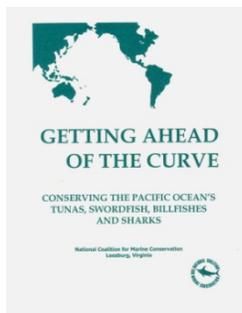
### **SHARK CONSERVATION, INCLUDING A BAN ON FINNING (1993-2011)**

In 1993, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), at the urging of NCMC, instituted a Fishery Management Plan for 39 species of Atlantic sharks. The federal plan set catch limits for commercial and recreational fishermen, yet the number of large coastal sharks, already low, continued to drop. An alarming rise in the number of sharks killed just for their fins in U.S. water led us, working with our partners in the Ocean Wildlife Campaign, to successfully persuade Congress to pass the "Shark Finning Prohibition Act of 2000". However, a loophole allowed U.S. vessels to purchase shark fins on the high seas and land them in U.S. ports. We helped close it with the Shark Conservation Act of 2011, which also strengthens enforcement of the shark finning ban by requiring sharks to be landed with their fins naturally attached. In addition, sanctions can be imposed on nations that have not implemented shark fishing regulations consistent with those placed on U.S. fishermen. U.S. actions to prohibit shark finning have led to similar actions in the international arena.

### **"GETTING AHEAD OF THE CURVE" IN THE PACIFIC (1996)**

NCMC invited over 130 fishery experts, scientists, managers, fishermen and conservationists to Monterey, California in November 1996 to discuss the need for greater ocean-wide conservation of large, highly migratory fish in the Pacific Ocean. Trends in the

Pacific fisheries revealed fishing for tunas, billfishes and sharks to be increasing and expected to increase into the future. Compounding the threat was the lack of up-to-date and complete



information to assess the status of the stocks. Finally, a review of existing Pacific fisheries management organizations exposed multiple gaps – geographic and functional – in the international conservation of these fish. In an attempt to “get ahead of the curve” and head off the widespread overfishing that occurred in Atlantic fisheries, NCMC published the symposium proceedings with recommendations for a cohesive management strategy, including: ratification of the UN Agreement on Highly Migratory Fish Stocks; better coordination among regional fisheries commissions; expansion of treaties to include less commercial species such

as billfish and sharks; and the use of multi-lateral trade measures to enforce international agreements.

### WEST COAST HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES FMP (2001-2004)

The impetus for the Pacific Council to develop its first-ever management plan for swordfish, tunas, marlin and sharks off the west coast in 2001 was to introduce a new pelagic longline fishery for swordfish and tuna, superseding a longstanding California state ban on the indiscriminate gear. NCMC marshaled support from other west coast groups and bringing in the national Ocean Wildlife Campaign, which we co-founded, to make a prohibition on longlining in federal waters a centerpiece of the plan. Enacted in 2004, it also included other measures we supported; data collection, restrictions on drift nets, a ban on the sale of striped marlin and catch limits for sharks.



### RESOLUTION TO PROTECT PELAGIC SARGASSUM (2000-2005)

NCMC pushed development of a federal Pelagic *Sargassum* Plan to forestall commercial exploitation of the pelagic brown algae that provides critical habitat for a host of oceanic species on the continental shelf off the southeastern U.S., as well as to strengthen the position of the U.S. in protecting *sargassum* as essential habitat on the high seas (Sargasso Sea). Working with the South Atlantic Council, we got a U.S. ban on commercial harvest approved in 2004. The next year, NCMC drafted a resolution to protect *sargassum*, convinced the U.S. to sponsor it at the 2005 ICCAT meeting, and secured a position on the U.S. ICCAT delegation to shepherd it through the 44-country body.

### TAKE MARLIN OFF THE MENU CAMPAIGN (2008-PRESENT)



The *Take Marlin Off the Menu* campaign was launched in 2008 by NCMC, in partnership with IGFA, after we both discovered that the U.S. is the largest importer of billfish in the world. The campaign has informed and educated consumers about the threatened status of marlin worldwide and the dangers of commercial over-exploitation, as we work with restaurants and seafood retailers to take the marlin-free pledge (among them Wegmans Food Stores and chef Wolfgang

Puck) and with the compilers of sustainable seafood guides to put marlin on their fish-to-avoid list. Finally, we drafted national legislation to raise awareness to the issue and rally political support in Congress.

## **BILLFISH CONSERVATION ACT OF 2012**

The Billfish Conservation Act of 2012 was signed by President Obama on October 5<sup>th</sup>. It effectively bans the importation of all billfish into the continental U.S. and is expected to end the sale of an estimated 30,000 marlin a year. It will also help close the black market for Atlantic-caught billfish. The Act marks the culmination of a united undertaking by a diverse coalition of angling and conservation organizations that NCMC Wild Oceans and IGFA helped mobilize to work in cooperation with a bipartisan group of congressional champions. For our work in passing the Act, we received the prestigious IGFA Conservation Award in January 2013.