



The NCMC

MARINE BULLETIN

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BACK TO THE FUTURE OF FISHING

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Is it the End of Overfishing, Or Just the Beginning of the End?

The end of overfishing is in sight, says the head of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). In 2012, science-based catch limits will be in place for all federally-managed fisheries, limits that must by law prevent overfishing. We'll no longer be taking fish out of the sea faster than they can replace themselves.

After years of overfishing, however, we are still laboring to return quite a few stocks to healthy levels; 48 out of 207 to be precise, among them Atlantic cod, bluefin tuna, coastal sharks, red snapper and grouper, and Pacific groundfish. But over the last 10 years, NMFS points out, we have rebuilt 21 fish stocks, including Georges Bank haddock, spiny dogfish and summer flounder. Others are on the road to recovery. In a marine environment where overfishing has long been the rule, reaching a point where it's the exception is indeed a milestone; although NMFS shares the blame for it taking so long to get here.

President Obama recently suggested, as part of his plan for consolidating the federal government, that NMFS (and its parent agency NOAA) should be moved out of the Department of Commerce, to Interior where we manage other fish and wildlife. It's an old idea with some appeal. But NMFS is probably not going anywhere. Fishing is big business, after all, generating \$72 billion a year and supporting 1.9 million jobs, with even contributions coming from the commercial and recreational fishing industries. The department estimates that fully rebuilding our fisheries will add

another \$31 billion to the economy and an additional 500,000 jobs. In the current political environment, we need to keep these long-term economic gains in mind as we face the short-term and sometimes painful sacrifices that rebuilding demands.

Most of the credit for turning our fisheries around goes to the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, passed in 1976 and beefed up a number of times since, most notably with strict anti-overfishing and pro-rebuilding requirements in 1996 and 2006. The National Coalition for Marine Conservation (NCMC) played a big role in each of those cornerstone events. Without a doubt, we've come a long way in the last 35 years. But it would be a serious mistake to think that the battle is won. Thirty-five years after signing the Declaration of Independence in 1776, the fledgling United States had to fight the British all over again in the War of 1812, also known as the Second War of Independence.

NMFS says we are now moving toward a future where overfishing is "a concern of the past," where the challenge is one of maintaining sustainable fisheries. "We are as happy as anyone with the progress we've all made in turning the nation's fisheries around and putting fish stocks on the path to recovery," says NCMC president Ken Hinman. "But if we really are going to sustain ocean fishing in the future, we must fight and win a second battle against overfishing. 'Ecosystem overfishing' has altered food webs, reduced diversity, and upset the balance between predators and their prey. In this battle, the stakes are even higher."

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GENERATION NEXT

Fishing is the great equalizer. The fish don't know how old you are, the color of your skin, or what you are wearing. What's on the surface up here doesn't mean much below it. What counts is why you fish, how you fish, and what you're giving back for the future of fish and fishing.

It's a cliché, but the kids are the future, and the Florida Fishing Academy is doing something for both. The Palm Beach County-based non-profit, founded in 2006, uses the sport of fishing to lure at-risk children away from drugs, gangs and other destructive lifestyles. The organization's slogan is: "Give a child a fish, feed him for a day; teach him to fish, feed him for a lifetime; teach him ethical angling, and protect his ability to fish for generations to come."

The Academy sponsors camps and classes to teach school-age girls and boys the joy of fishing - being out on a boat, rigging tackle and bait, casting and catching. The kids learn to keep what they will eat and release the rest. While on the water they see dolphins, turtles and birds. They get lessons in fish biology and marine conservation.

The goal is to produce a new generation of young people with a healthy hobby that will last a lifetime; a conservation ethic that will put them in the ranks of protectors of the marine environment, and hopefully point some of them into a career as marine biologists or conservationists. It's a win for everyone: the kids, the fish, and the community.

For those young people who've already dedicated themselves to a career in marine sciences, the Steven Berkeley Marine Conservation Fellowship offers a \$10,000 scholarship to graduate students "actively engaged in thesis research in marine conservation." The competitive award program, sponsored by the American Fisheries Society, was created in 2007 to honor the memory of Steve Berkeley, a well respected and groundbreaking fisheries scientist who passed away from cancer that year.

Through the annual award, Steve's passion for bringing together the fields of fisheries, ecology and conservation continues to inspire young scientists to follow his lead. For instance, the 2011 recipient of the Berkeley Fellowship was Valentina Di Santo, a Ph.D. student at Boston University. Her research examines how fish physiology and behavior are affected by environmental factors such as climate change and ocean acidification. It's not just an academic exercise, but has real-world application. Knowing how fish adapt to a changing environment is crucial to predicting future shifts in geographical range and population dynamics and to developing conservation strategies that take these adjustments into account.

The Florida Fishing Academy and the Berkeley Fellowship are just two examples of programs aimed at inspiring the next generation of salt water anglers, fishery scientists and conservation advocates. There are many other fine programs doing this important work. Support them. The future of fishing depends on our youth, and their depending on us.

-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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For information or comment, contact:

The NCMC
Marine Bulletin

Pam Lyons Gromen, Editor
 4 Royal Street, SE
 Leesburg, VA 20175
 office: (703) 777-0037
 fax: (703) 777-1107

ANNUAL REPORT 2011

A Landmark Year for the Future of Fishing

The National Coalition for Marine Conservation's mission is to bring conservation-minded fishermen and pro-fishing environmentalists together to promote a broad, ecosystems approach to fisheries management that reflects our expanding circle of concern for all marine life and the future of fishing. Our programs emphasize conserving the ocean's top predators - the big billfish, swordfish, tunas and sharks that are the lions and tigers of the sea - while protecting the ocean forage base; menhaden, sardine, herring, mackerel, squid and other species crucial to the survival of a wide range of predatory fish, marine mammals and seabirds.



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MISSION ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In 2011, NCMC made unprecedented progress by achieving a number of the goals we'd set for ourselves. We made progress toward protecting marlin and bluefin tuna from commercial over-exploitation while moving away from destructive longlining to more selective, more sustainable fishing gears. At the same time, we made significant breakthroughs in preserving the ocean's forage base, foremost among these a landmark agreement to restore Atlantic menhaden. In addition, we helped initiate a new fishery ecosystem plan for the west coast that will better protect Pacific sardine, mackerel and other forage species; fishery plan amendments by two federal councils whose chief purpose is to safeguard river herring and other threatened prey species from industrial trawling; and new guidance for defining sustainable fishing for key prey species.

Billfish Conservation Act Gains Traction

Working side-by-side with IGFA to *Take Marlin Off the Menu*, we successfully renewed efforts in Congress to pass national legislation to close U.S. markets to imports of marlin and other billfish. The Billfish Conservation Act of 2010 expired at the close of the 109th Congress. With backing from the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation – made up of leaders of the top conservation and outdoor industry organizations in the nation – the Billfish Conservation Act of 2011 was re-introduced last summer. The bill is gaining broad bi-partisan

support, which is key to passage of legislation in the polarized atmosphere of an election year. The House bill (HR 2706) has 24 co-sponsors from both sides of the aisle, including members of the pivotal Resources Committee, while the Senate bill (S 1451) has nine co-sponsors – 4 Republicans and 5 Democrats, most of whom are members of the Commerce Committee. Committee hearings and mark-ups could happen as early as this spring.

ASMFC Moves to Increase Menhaden Abundance and Availability as Forage

NCMC's work to protect the ecological role of Atlantic menhaden paid off with an historic change in the way this critical prey fish is conserved and managed. The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's decision to adopt a new target for increasing abundance of menhaden will substantially benefit all its many predators in the future, all along the east coast, from Maine to North Carolina, as well as anglers who want to see lots of striped bass, tuna and other important recreational and commercial species. The commission is now putting together the first coast-wide catch limits to end decades of overfishing, bring about a substantial increase in spawning stock, and increase available forage for predatory fish, dolphin and whales, and sea birds. It's a watershed event for fisheries on the east coast.

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West Coast Ecosystem Planning Begins

The Pacific Fishery Management Council approved a Fishery Ecosystem Plan for the California Current, a plan designed to ensure that existing and future management measures take into account fishing's effects on the ecosystem and other species. We applaud the council's decision to move ahead with an FEP, especially their plans to address forage fish conservation, as well as our concerns about new fisheries developing for unmanaged species before we understand the impact on the west coast food base.

Saving Bluefin and Other Threatened Species from Longlining

In 2011 NCMC continued to promote a transition from commercial fishing with multi-mile longlines to alternatives that minimize bycatch, such as buoy gear, green-sticks and "short-set" longlines. These gears can be used to target yellowfin tuna and swordfish without significant mortality of non-target bluefin tuna, marlin, sharks and turtles. Sustained pressure on federal officials to reduce longline bycatch of bluefin tuna in the Gulf of Mexico produced a rule requiring the use of so-called "weak hooks" that may let more giant bluefin escape. But NMFS recognizes that this isn't enough and agreed to begin development of Amendment 7 to its Atlantic Highly Migratory Species Management Plan to consider additional ways to reduce unintended catch of bluefin, with an emphasis on the gulf spawning grounds. That amendment will consider everything from hard caps on bycatch and area closures in the Gulf of Mexico to gear modifications (e.g., shorter lines and sets to allow more bycatch to be released alive) and the use of more selective gears. A pair of pilot studies were launched, one in the Gulf of Mexico and the other off California, to test gears to replace longlines.

River Herring and Other Disappearing Species are Object of New Plans

Herring, mackerel, squid, butterfish and shad are critical components of the northeast forage base. And all are in low supply. NCMC has been working to get, among other things, better catch monitoring and bycatch reduction measures for the industrial-scale trawl fisheries that target sea herring, mackerel and squid. Because of our efforts, the New England and Mid-Atlantic Councils are developing Amendment 5 to the Atlantic Herring FMP and Amendment 14 to the Squid, Mackerel and Butterfish Plan, respectively. Both amendments feature draft measures to conserve river herring and shad, with an emphasis on at-sea bycatch in the mid-water trawl fisheries. If all goes as scheduled, final action will be taken this year for implementation in 2013. Also through the Mid-Atlantic Council, we successfully obtained a conservative "buffer" in the

mackerel catch quota to protect against uncertainty about the health of the stock; a commitment from the council to incorporate ecological factors when they set allowable catch levels for mackerel, squid and butterfish; and formation of a new scientific Ecosystems Subcommittee along with a council commitment to establish ecosystem goals and methods for achieving them.

Defining a Sustainable Forage Fishery

Years of NCMC work with the Marine Stewardship Council culminated in tough new standards for fisheries that harvest sardines, anchovies, herring, capelin and other important prey fish, standards they'll now have to meet if they wish to win MSC's coveted sustainability certificate. The aquaculture industry's dependence on wild-caught fish for feed is widely recognized as a serious threat to marine ecosystems. Worldwide, more than half of all the fish people eat now comes from farms and that percentage is growing fast. The new guidance implemented by the MSC in 2011 clarifies levels of stock abundance for "low trophic level species" to be maintained to protect the ecosystem. For a minimum passing score, a fishery must be maintained at no less than 40% of its un-fished biomass. Within 5 years of certification, fisheries must be maintained at 75% of an un-fished level.

Workshop Provides Guidance on Ecosystem-Based Fisheries Management

In 2009, after persuading NMFS to revise its national fishery standards to recommend more conservative abundance targets for forage fish, NCMC began pushing for a national workshop to provide more explicit guidance on ecosystem-based fishery management in general and forage fish in particular. Largely because of our efforts, that workshop was held, in Williamsburg, Virginia last October. The 4th National Scientific and Statistical Committee Workshop - each of the eight regional fishery management councils relies on its SSC to set allowable biological catch levels - devoted three full days to the topic. The Mid-Atlantic Council hosted the meeting and chaired the program committees and, in part due to our ongoing work with that council and its science advisors on forage fish issues, a special forage fish session was included on the agenda. Among the recommendations to come out of the workshop were suggestions that council SSCs more fully account for predation in stock assessments and consider estimating forage biomass and forage demands at the ecosystem level as a measure of ecosystem health. Another recommendation of the workshop was for two national working groups to be formed - a socio-economic group and a forage fish group - to explore and develop ways to establish "optimum yield," the federally-mandated balance of social, economic and ecological considerations, in annual catch specifications. □



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

- ✦ NCMC president Ken Hinman and executive director Pam Lyons Gromen traveled to **Baltimore, MD** on December 1st for a Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) Executive Committee meeting. After reviewing ecosystem approaches employed in other regions, the committee voted to move forward with the creation of an ecosystem-based fisheries management guidance document for the Mid-Atlantic.
- ✦ Ken attended the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) Menhaden Technical Committee meeting, January 9th, in **Linthicum, MD**. The committee decided to consider a range of possible catch reductions that would increase the menhaden population above the new overfishing threshold and eventually achieve the new abundance target. The Menhaden Management Board, after taking public comment later this year, will determine how long it should take to reach the rebuilding target and with what probability.
- ✦ Ken represented NCMC as a member of the Marine Fish Conservation Network's board of advisors at a Strategic Planning Workshop in **Annapolis, MD** on January 12th. The workshop was held to re-evaluate how the Network operates as a coalition; ways to define the Network to policymakers, stakeholders and the general public; and advance the 100-plus member groups' shared long-term interest in healthy wild ocean fisheries.
- ✦ IGFA conservation director Jason Schratweiser joined Ken Hinman for **Capitol Hill** visits January 18th on behalf The Billfish Conservation Act. They met with staff from the offices of Senators Jim DeMint (R-SC), John Kerry (D-MA), Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) and Kelly Ayotte (R-NH), all members of the key Committee on Commerce, as well as staff from the office of Sen. Vitter (R-LA), who introduced S. 1451, and the Republican staff director for the Commerce Committee.
- ✦ On January 18th and 19th, Pam attended a joint meeting of the ASMFC River Herring Stock Assessment Subcommittee and the River Herring & Shad Technical Committee in **Baltimore, MD**. The group reviewed a draft of the new river herring stock assessment and developed assessment conclusions and research recommendations. The assessment results will undergo a peer review before they are reported to the Shad & River Herring Management Board this spring.
- ✦ Pam and Ken represented NCMC in a visioning focus group hosted by the MAFMC on January 20th in **Washington, DC**. Feedback from the focus group and other data collected from stakeholders during the Council's Visioning Project will be used to develop a strategic plan for Mid-Atlantic fisheries.
- ✦ As chair of the Advisory Panel, Pam was at the table when the ASMFC Shad and River Herring Management Board convened on February 7th in **Alexandria, VA**. The Board formed a working group to develop positions on river herring bycatch monitoring and reduction measures contained in Amendment 5 to the Atlantic Herring Fishery Management Plan. The working group recommendations will be provided to the full Board for approval and will be submitted during the official Amendment 5 public comment period that is expected to begin in March.
- ✦ On February 8th the ASMFC Menhaden Management Board approved a Public Information Document asking for public comment on how (what management measures) and when to meet a new rebuilding target adopted last November. "The commission is so far keeping to its tight schedule to approve the menhaden amendment this year and get new catch limits into place by the 2013 fishing season," said NCMC's Ken Hinman, who attended and testified at the board meeting in **Alexandria, VA**.
- ✦ A meeting was held on February 10th in **Washington, DC** to develop a work plan for the developing menhaden amendment and to coordinate the efforts of the diverse groups working to improve menhaden conservation and management. Pam and Ken both attended the meeting to share strategy recommendations.
- ✦ Pam traveled to **Virginia Beach, VA** to attend the MAFMC meeting on February 14th and 15th where issues on the agenda included revamping the mission statement of the Ecosystems and Ocean Planning Committee, revising the overfishing risk policy for data poor stocks and reconstituting the Council's advisory panels to be more representative of the stakeholders engaged in each council-managed fishery.
- ✦ Swordfish management was the topic at a Pacific Fishery Management Council meeting on March 2nd. Ken traveled to **Sacramento, CA** to testify on how the U.S. can develop a local and sustainable fishery for swordfish off the west coast, one that will protect turtles, sharks, billfish and other vulnerable species from indiscriminate drift nets and longlines. He advocated continued research into alternative gears, gear modifications to longlines, and hard caps on bycatch species for all allowable gears.



BACK TO THE FUTURE OF FISHING *continued from page 1*

INTO THE WILD

If you want things to stay as they are, things will have to change. - Sicilian writer Giuseppe di Lampedusa

Conservation, according to Aldo Leopold, is a state of harmony between men and the sea. Every other creature in the ocean knows instinctively how to relate to its environment. We alone must figure it out for ourselves. It's not easy. We share with all other species the evolutionary drive to selfishly advance our own interests. But in our case, it becomes a disadvantage when we irreparably harm the environment that supports us.

As we've said before, "So much of what we love about the sea, about fish, about fishing, is in the wildness." But that wild world, and the future of the kind of fishing we love, now hangs in the balance. Everything we do, every decision we make, must be guided by a clear vision of the future we want for our oceans and of how the fishing public will fit into that future.

Absent a vision of wild oceans and the future of fishing, we surrender that future to industrialized fishing fleets, using mammoth trawls and multi-mile longlines to maximize yields, while killing non-target fish and other wildlife indiscriminately. We resign the science of assessing

healthy fish populations to mathematical models rather than ecological principles. We sacrifice wild-caught fisheries that support fishing communities for seafood produced on offshore "farms". We zone the sea for multiple, incompatible uses while relegating wildness to marine parks. And in the end, we deny millions of anglers, of this generation and the next and the next, a place in the future. (See Ocean View, p. 2)

Progress isn't just moving forward, it's going toward where you want to be, even if it's back to the kind of future we once envisioned but that's now getting away from us. Progress in technology, for instance, can be compatible with and actually foster wild fisheries. Technological advances can provide solutions such as developing more selective fishing gears, or modifying existing gears to minimize adverse impacts on fish and their habitat. It can help us with monitoring and enforcement. It can improve our knowledge and understanding of complex marine ecosystems and help us fish while leaving as small a saltwater footprint as possible.

But in the end, perhaps the biggest change we need to make is to be more humble, to give up the idea that we can manipulate the ocean into a factory that produces the species we want, in the quantities we demand. As the French skeptic Montaigne advised, "Let us a little permit Nature to take her own way; she better understands her own affairs than we." □

Your mailing label now includes your membership renewal date.



www.savethefish.org
Leesburg, VA 20175
4 Royal Street, S.E.

