



THE
PEW
ENVIRONMENT GROUP



FISHERIES MANAGEMENT – A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Since 1976, the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act has been the primary tool for managing fishing in federal waters, defined generally as 3 to 200 miles off U.S. coasts. After more than 20 years of rapidly declining fish populations, Congress amended the Magnuson-Stevens Act in 1996 to establish a new national sustainable fisheries policy that prohibited catching fish faster than they can reproduce, a practice known as “overfishing.” The 1996 amendments also directed fisheries managers to restore depleted fish populations to healthy levels; minimize the catching and killing of non-target ocean wildlife (known as bycatch); and identify and protect essential habitat for spawning and feeding.

After a decade of continued overfishing and declining fish populations, Congress again amended the Magnuson-Stevens Act in 2006 to close existing loopholes and strengthen the role of science in management decisions. The revised Act requires fishery managers to establish annual catch limits and accountability measures that are based on the best available science and to end overfishing in all U.S. fisheries by 2011. The amended Act also directs the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), the federal agency responsible for overseeing fisheries management, to better integrate fishery management planning with national environmental review procedures under the National Environmental Policy Act.

The Magnuson-Stevens Act established eight Regional Fishery Management Councils, advisory bodies without regulatory authority, to develop fishery management plans and amendments for

the federally managed fisheries in their regions. These Councils are composed of representatives from coastal states, the NMFS regional director and individuals representing recreational and commercial fishing interests, all appointed by the Secretary of Commerce. In addition, each Council has a scientific and statistical committee that advises it on scientific matters and is required by the law to provide recommendations on acceptable biological catch levels for each fishery.













Councils develop recommended fishery management plans (FMPs) and amendments for species in their regions based on assessments conducted by NMFS regional fisheries scientists. Councils submit proposed plans to the Secretary of Commerce to review for consistency with the Magnuson-Stevens Act. The Secretary may approve, disapprove or partially approve a plan or amendment. In general, FMPs must prevent overfishing and rebuild depleted fish populations; protect, restore and promote the long-term health and stability of the fishery; and assess and protect the fishery’s essential habitats from damaging fishing practices.

FISHERIES MANAGEMENT IN THE MID-ATLANTIC

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, one of the eight regional Councils, manages coastal fisheries from New York to North Carolina. The Mid-Atlantic Council consists of 21 voting and 4 non-voting members. These include representatives from New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia and North Carolina, as well as the NMFS Regional Administrator, members from the public and the fishing industry. The Council is supported by a small staff, advisory panels, and a

scientific and statistical committee. The Mid-Atlantic Council also coordinates management of fisheries in state waters (generally out to 3 miles offshore) with

The Mid-Atlantic Council has developed and is implementing fishery management plans for 12 fish species, including:

 Atlantic Mackerel	 Surfclam
 Loligo Squid	 Ocean Quahog
 Illex Squid	 Summer Flounder
 Butterfish	 Scup
 Bluefish	 Black Sea Bass
 Tilefish	 Spiny Dogfish ¹

the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, a group of 15 Atlantic states in charge of the conservation and management of near-shore fishery resources.

Mid-Atlantic fish populations are regularly assessed to evaluate the size and structure of each. Based on information from sampling, scientists statistically model populations to determine if they are experiencing overfishing or if the population's size is too small ("overfished") and must be rebuilt. This information is used to establish appropriate catch levels. Assessments of Mid-Atlantic species are conducted at Stock Assessment Workshops by the

federal government's Northeast Fishery Science Center. These findings are reviewed by the Stock Assessment Review Committee, an independent panel of fisheries scientists. The Mid-Atlantic Council relies on species-specific monitoring committees to recommend catch levels for each of its managed populations based on the assessments. These committees include state agency scientists, and representatives from the Science Center and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission.

The full Council meets six times a year to hear committee reports, legal advice from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (the parent agency of NMFS), public comments and staff recommendations on management actions. After the Council approves a policy or management motion, the final action is sent to NMFS for consideration. If NMFS, in turn, approves the action, it publishes proposed regulations and solicits public comment before promulgating final regulations.

Currently, the Mid-Atlantic Council is developing an omnibus amendment to address annual catch limits and accountability measures for all the fish populations it manages. Fishery management plans need to be amended and annual catch limits and accountability measures must be in place by 2011 as mandated by the law; a deadline the Mid-Atlantic Council is actively working toward meeting.

¹ The Mid-Atlantic Council leads the management of spiny dogfish. The Council also co-manages monkfish with the New England Fishery Management Council, which is the lead on that plan.



For more information, please contact:

Bill Wolfe | Program Manager | Ending Overfishing in the Mid-Atlantic
 (609) 397-2624 bwolfe@pewtrusts.org
 For more resources visit our new website www.endoverfishing.org.

For additional information, please see:

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
<http://www.mafmc.org/mid-atlantic/mafmc.htm>
 Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission
<http://www.asmfc.org/>

