

# The National Fisheries Plan—

## A NOAA Overview

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The multitude of problems plaguing our fisheries have been recognized for many years and numerous attempts have been made to resolve them. But these attempts have usually focused on individual problems and have tried to treat them in isolation. At best, such efforts have provided piecemeal remedies for the ills of specific interest groups. At worst, they have created new problems as diverse as conflicting state regulations and as critical as the depletion of some fishery resources.

Now, hopefully, we are beginning to see the development of more balanced and comprehensive approaches in which individual problems are being considered within the context of the overall problem of fishery rehabilitation. These approaches are aimed at establishing broad new policies to address the common problems of fishermen and to reconcile apparent conflicts between harvesting and conservation interests, between supporters of opposing views on national and international regulatory jurisdictions, and even between commercial and sports fishermen.

Over 5 years ago, the Stratton Commission recommended a number of administrative, legislative, and international measures to rehabilitate our fisheries without depleting the resource. Most of these recommendations have not been implemented, and the basic problems they were intended to correct remain with us.

Now, as we discussed this morning, international issues of fishery jurisdiction and conservation are being tackled in the LOS conferences, and Senate Resolution 1988 which we also discussed earlier is pertinent. If the conferences produce agreement on extending jurisdiction to 200 miles, coastal nations will be faced with new obligations to protect and manage the fishery resources in these zones. In the United States today, fishery management in the territorial sea is the responsibility of the states, but we have no mechanism for managing fisheries in the existing 9-mile contiguous zone beyond the 3-mile limit. Fulfilling new obligations for fishery management to a 200-mile limit will, thus, be a truly awesome task. On the other side of the coin, however, extended jurisdiction will give us the opportunity to improve the resource base and the economic viability of a large segment of the U.S. fishing industry.

Recent events in another international body will also have an effect on U.S. fisheries. The International Commission for the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries, in 1973, adopted U.S. proposals to reduce annual catches of certain stocks to allow them to recover. This action will, in the long run, increase the harvest of

these stocks and, in the meantime, will benefit the American fishermen by reducing the foreign take of species of great demand in the U.S. market.

On the domestic front, we are now establishing the basis for genuinely national fishery policies rather than the purely federal or local plans we have had. The Senate's National Ocean Policy Study under Commerce Committee Chairman Senator Magnuson is directed by Senator Hollings, the able Chairman of the Study Group. Among the goals of this Study is the establishment of policies for the "full utilization and conservation of living resources" and recommending solutions to problems in marine fisheries management and rehabilitation. The results of the Study, we have been promised, will be used in formulating new legislation.

At the present time, there is no really effective state management of migratory fish stocks. Senator Eastland has introduced a resolution to support state efforts directed to the conservation and scientific management of fishery resources. He proposes that this be accomplished with strong participation by three major regional fisheries commissions, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, and the Pacific Marine Fisheries Commission. This thrust could contribute instrumentally to the formation of cooperative regional programs for the management of common fishery resources.

The National Fisheries Plan, the subject of this symposium, was proposed by NACOA in 1972. NACOA's purpose was to establish a national strategy for rehabilitating U.S. fisheries by assuring continued resource productivity and a proper U.S. share of the harvest, while accommodating the needs of both recreational and commercial fisheries. Currently, the U.S. fishing industry satisfies only 40% of this country's demand for food fish. NACOA suggested that the National Fisheries Plan establish a target goal for increasing the share supplied by the domestic industry. In 1973, after NACOA had clarified its proposal, the Secretary of Commerce requested NOAA to begin work on the Plan. In developing the Plan NOAA is working closely with the Department of Interior, the states, and industry groups.