

# The National Fisheries Plan \*

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Admiral Behrens has outlined for you several developing circumstances of fisheries in the United States, and indeed in the world, which make the development of a national plan not just a good idea, but a necessity for our fisheries at this time.

I will first describe for you the general nature of the National Fisheries Plan, and then discuss how it is being developed to provide for the involvement of many people needed to ensure its general acceptance.

First, it will be a broad plan designed to cover actions needed by all concerned with fisheries. This includes federal and state governments, the recreational and commercial industries, universities, conservation and recreational groups, and supporting industries. It will not simply be a plan for federal action, since action by the federal government or any other single party can achieve only a limited amount by itself. Since it will cover all interests, not just federal, it will be developed in cooperation with states and others.

Second, although described as a National Plan, it will cover only marine commercial and recreational fisheries and some aspects of inland commercial fisheries, such as catfish. It will not include inland recreational or Great Lakes fisheries, for which plans for some parts are being developed by the U.S. Department of the Interior in cooperation with the concerned states.

Third, no plan could possibly encompass all actions needed in fisheries. The National Plan will cover only the broad policy and strategy needed to restore and maintain our fisheries at their full potential. It will not replace more specific programs, such as the State-Federal or the NOAA aquaculture programs, but will relate these to other ongoing programs and propose new programs which together can attack the problems facing U.S. fisheries.

Fourth, it will develop all the economic and social evaluations of the options that available data permit to enable sound selection of options for inclusion in the plan. It is being developed on a tight timetable for completion and approval of a draft plan by July 1975. At this moment, it is on schedule.

The plan is being developed under the guidance of an internal policy committee chaired by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Director, Robert Schoning, and with the advice of a committee drawn from members of the Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee and NACOA. The work is being done by a small full time staff and five senior NMFS staff members assigned as full time task leaders.

The mission and goals of the National Fisheries Plan were developed with considerable assistance of many people in and out of government. They address the continuing contributions of fisheries to the people of the United States and directions of the future of fisheries to increase this contribution to national and local interests.

\*The title of the National Fisheries Plan has changed to National Plan for Marine Fisheries in June 1975.

The *mission* is to optimize the economic, social, and aesthetic value of fisheries to the nation consistent with maintaining fisheries resources for the future.

Four goals were selected: (1) restore and maintain fisheries stocks of interest to the U.S.; (2) develop and maintain a healthy commercial and recreational fishing industry; (3) improve the contribution of marine resources to recreation and other social benefits; (4) increase the supply of desirable, wholesome, competitively priced fishery products to the consumer.

The National Fisheries Plan is giving careful consideration to the needs of recreational fishermen as well as commercial fishermen, and several National Plan issues directly address improving marine recreational opportunities.

Some issues deal directly with marine recreation, others with several of the broad aspects of management which concern both recreational and commercial fisheries. One such important issue is that of allocation. Our country's needs for both recreation and food are growing. We believe that fish can contribute to both needs; but in many cases, we lack a satisfactory procedure for deciding how limited fisheries resources can be allocated in the fairest manner between these different national needs. This is one of the issues being explored in the Plan.

Based on comments of our regional staff on material submitted to them in April this year, a draft National Fisheries Plan outline was developed to provide a basis for an extensive review by many entities. This document was distributed to national fisheries and conservation organizations, state agencies, and our own regions in September for comprehensive review and comment by late January 1975. The outline consists of (1) a description of the principal problems and potentials of U.S. fisheries; (2) a series of papers covering what we believe are the major issues in fisheries today, together with a series of options for addressing the issues; and (3) a series of summaries showing briefly how these issues might apply to a number of major U.S. fisheries or species.

Series of meetings are being held across the country to obtain in-depth views and comments by state and local fishing interests. A pattern for many of the meetings was set up at a workshop held in July by Dr. John Harville of the Pacific Marine Fisheries Commission. The workshop was attended by about 35 people from states and federal governments, Sea Grant universities, and others, who spent long hours laying the basis for future meetings on the west coast.

While the comments, opinions, and suggestions are being developed across the country, we will begin to refine the options to be considered, writing them up in more detail, and developing the cost, benefit, social, environmental, priority, and other assessments which will form the basis for selection. The result will be an array of optional courses of action in different areas of fisheries. Each proposed course of action will show the estimated costs, benefits, and other consequences of such action. From these, a selection will be made to pick those options which show the most promise of success in achieving the program goals. Those selected will be written into the draft Plan by May 1975. This draft Plan will undergo a thorough national review before implementation.

The Plan will no doubt call for changes in NMFS role and programs. In addition, we see both the present draft outline form which is now completed, and the final form which will follow next year, as providing a useful basis for grass-

roots inquiries to be held by the Marine Fisheries Commissions under the East-land Resolution. These two activities are quite separate, representing initiatives of the executive and legislative branches, but they are both directed to the same concerns, and ultimately will contribute in complementary ways to the future of our fisheries. A third initiative you have heard discussed today is the Ocean Policy Study, which we believe will also bring powerful forces to bear on our fisheries problems.

The reconciliation of the many fisheries interests in our country is no easy one, and we do not believe the National Fisheries Plan can provide instant or total solutions. We do believe that with the help of all fisheries interests across our country it can provide a rational basis for a greatly improved future for our depleted fisheries resources, our recreational and commercial fishermen and industries, and the millions in our country who enjoy eating fish. We see it providing a considered basis for helping to shape national policy and recommendations for legislation, to enable fisheries to move ahead. We see it leading to opportunities for more fruitful and effective state-federal cooperation in fisheries to take seriously needed action and we see program changes to provide a much sounder nationally (not federally) planned attack upon the fisheries problems of today.

The development of a National Fisheries Plan is an immense undertaking and NOAA is putting a major effort into the project. With the goodwill and help of many concerned people in this room and elsewhere, the plan can succeed, and the benefits to our recreation, our food supply and our industries can be great.