

U.S. Fishery Management Gets a New Vehicle

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally, the United States has been unable to conserve its fishery resources effectively on a national basis because comprehensive statutory authority was lacking. Management has been exercised by the several coastal states and through voluntary international agreements; but because of the division of jurisdiction these separate management authorities were unable to provide adequate management control over many widespread and migratory fish stocks.

This situation has changed with the passage of the Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976 (Public Law 94-265). This new Act, which is characterized by its Congressional authors as "a new form of government," asserts U.S. management authority over stocks of fish and shellfish within 200 miles of the U.S. coast. In broad summary, the Act which is effective March 1, 1977:

1. Provides authority for exclusive United States management authority over all fish, except highly migratory species, within a newly constituted Fishery Conservation Zone contiguous to the territorial sea.
2. Provides exclusive United States management authority beyond the Fisheries Conservation Zone for certain anadromous and Continental Shelf fishery resources.
3. Establishes eight Regional Fishery Management Councils, instruments of State-Federal interaction in the conduct of such fisheries management.
4. Sets forth seven National Standards for Conservation and Management with which the management of fishery resources must be consistent.
5. Provides for the preparation and implementation of fishery management plans.
6. Provides for mechanisms to allocate catch of fish between U.S. and foreign fleets with preference to U.S. fishermen.

The Act sets forth basic objectives for a viable conservation and management program for the nation's fishery resources aimed at assuring that management plans and regulations developed by the Regional Fishery Management Councils take into account the variability of fish resources, the individuality of fishermen, the needs of consumers, and the obligations to the general public, now and in generations to come. These objectives are embodied in the seven National Standards for Fishery Conservation and Management set forth in the Act.

It is anticipated that effective implementation of this new management authority will halt overfishing of U.S. coastal resources, restore many marine species now depleted, and ensure that they will continue to thrive, and provide increased economic and social benefit to U.S. citizens.