

**WRITTEN STATEMENT FROM THE
NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

**SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD FOR THE OVERSIGHT HEARING
ON
RESTORING AMERICAN SEAFOOD COMPETITIVENESS**

**BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER, WILDLIFE, AND FISHERIES
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

JUNE 4, 2025

Introduction

NOAA appreciates the ongoing work with this Subcommittee to spotlight the importance of our fisheries to our economy, food security, recreation, and tourism.

Magnuson-Stevens Act, Science, and Management

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) has been instrumental for successful fisheries management. U.S. fisheries are among the world's largest and most sustainable. The MSA, the keystone of U.S. fisheries management legislation, turns 50 next year, and in that time has demonstrated that a dynamic science-based management process is fundamental for sustainably managing fisheries. The goal of fisheries management is to achieve fisheries that are recreationally, economically and environmentally sustainable. In partnership with regional fishery management councils (councils), interstate fishery commissions, coastal states, and our stakeholders, and driven by the MSA, NOAA Fisheries has ended overfishing in most cases and is rebuilding domestic fish stocks. Currently, 90 percent of stocks for which we have assessments are not subject to overfishing and 88 percent are not overfished.¹ U.S. commercial and recreational fishing supported 2.3 million jobs and generated \$321 billion in sales across the broader economy in 2022. By preventing overfishing and rebuilding stocks, we are strengthening the value of fisheries to the economy and communities that depend on them, and also ensuring a sustainable supply of seafood for the nation in the future.

The MSA created broad goals for U.S. fisheries management, including ten national standards to promote sustainable fisheries, and a unique, highly participatory management structure centered

¹ NOAA Fisheries Fishery Stock Status Updates. 2024 Quarter 4 Update through December 31, 2024. <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/population-assessments/fishery-stock-status-updates#2024-quarterly-updates>.

on the councils. This structure encourages a collaborative, “bottom up” process where fishermen, other fishery stakeholders, affected states, tribal governments, and the Federal Government all provide input and influence decisions about how to manage U.S. fisheries.

Flexibility to determine what management approach will be most effective for each council’s fisheries is a fundamental element in the success of the council system. In making their recommendations, each council can choose from a variety of approaches and tools to manage fish stocks and meet the mandates of the MSA—specifying how to establish required catch limits, determine allocation mechanisms for who receives what amount of fish, and develop a structure for rebuilding overfished stocks when such actions are necessary.

Councils make management recommendations through a transparent, collaborative process that includes extensive public input, scientific research, and consideration of economic and social impacts. These recommended measures are submitted to the Secretary of Commerce for approval and, if approved, are then implemented by NOAA Fisheries. The MSA also established a Council Coordination Committee (CCC), which is made up of the chairs, vice chairs, and executive directors from each regional council. NOAA Fisheries meets with the CCC twice a year to discuss issues relevant to all councils and to work collaboratively to develop national solutions to those issues.

Management decisions that provide for thriving and sustainable fisheries need sound science. For instance, scientific analyses and assessments that incorporate data collected on fish stocks, fisheries, and the surrounding marine ecosystems are used to implement policies including the catch limits required by the MSA. NOAA Fisheries has established a first-rate scientific enterprise built upon our internal resources, such as our fleet of research vessels, advanced technology assets, and the scientific expertise of our staff, as well as our strong collaborations with the fishing industry. As we continue to advance our scientific enterprise to address emerging priorities, we remain eager to work with the committee to modernize data collection efforts and analytical capabilities, such as through expanded use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), to improve the underlying science necessary to increase the responsiveness of fisheries management to real-time ocean conditions, as called for in the President’s 2025 [Executive Order 14276 on Restoring America’s Seafood Competitiveness](#) (E.O. 14276). An important pillar for effectively managing U.S. fisheries is the timeliness and quality of fishery-dependent data collected from the fishery, in some cases during fishing operations. NOAA Fisheries continues to improve the efficiency of our data collection programs by implementing electronic logbooks for fishermen and observers, continuing to shift data systems to the Cloud, and developing camera-based electronic monitoring programs. As an example, the entire Greater Atlantic Region (North Carolina to Maine which covers thousands of vessels) implemented an electronic logbook program for every commercial and for-hire fishery, and we are working to extend those capabilities for the entire Atlantic coast, in an effort to streamline logbook reporting especially for fishermen that operate in multiple regions.

In addition, NOAA Fisheries has implemented 14 camera-based electronic monitoring programs across U.S. fisheries, either to supplement data collected by observers in some cases or to replace observers in others. We are in the process of implementing an electronic monitoring program in

the Pacific Islands longline fishery, which is expected to reduce costs while improving monitoring coverage to support long-term management decisions. The adoption of an electronic monitoring program in this fishery will provide NOAA Fisheries an opportunity to address data sharing challenges that can limit the potential of using AI in monitoring programs, especially in international fisheries.

Further, we have identified additional opportunities to develop cross-regional or national standards to support technology integration and greater efficiency for fishermen. Expanding electronic logbook programs requires improvements to coast-wide vessel permitting systems and shared tools for software development. There are a number of opportunities to leverage AI to save the agency and fishermen costs in these programs, such as creating video interoperability standards and building a cloud-based image library for internal and public access to improve the efficiency of analyzing video collected from camera-based systems.

Seafood Competitiveness

While the United States is a global leader in sustainable fisheries management due to our participatory, science-based system, the U.S. seafood sector faces growing pressures from global competition, evolving market demands, and changing ocean conditions. Domestic fishery landings decreased by approximately 1 billion pounds between 2019 and 2023, landings revenue decreased 16% and average price (revenue-per-pound) decreased 18% in inflation-adjusted terms between 2022 and 2023. The United States imports nearly 80 percent of its seafood. It is essential to ensure that our high demand for imported seafood does not create incentives for illegal, unreported, or unregulated (IUU) fishing activity. NOAA must also work to ensure fair global market access for U.S. seafood producers. That is why, in response to E.O. 14276, the Department of Commerce, through NOAA Fisheries, is launching a coordinated effort to help revitalize the U.S. seafood sector. This effort builds on the work begun in response to President Trump's 2020 [Executive Order 13921 on Promoting American Seafood Competitiveness and Economic Growth](#) (E.O. 13921).

Through the implementation of E.O. 14276, NOAA aims to address the recent decline in domestic fisheries landings and revenue, boost sustainable aquaculture, reduce the seafood trade deficit, and strengthen supply chain resilience. NOAA Fisheries has identified three strategic objectives for meeting the directives outlined in E.O. 14276: 1) Promote the productive harvest of U.S. seafood resources by streamlining regulatory burdens while maintaining sustainability standards; 2) Modernize fisheries science and data systems to enable real-time business and management decisions, and 3) Strengthen domestic and global market access and domestic processing capacity to reduce the seafood trade deficit and remove barriers to fair competition for American seafood producers. The United States had a \$20.4 billion seafood trade deficit in 2023—nearly unchanged relative to 2020 after spiking to around \$26 billion in 2021 and 2022.

As one of the first steps in this effort, NOAA plans to seek public comment on suggestions to improve fisheries management and science, as outlined in E.O. 14276. Further, we have already

initiated efforts to engage our council partners to identify recommendations to reduce burdens on domestic fishing and to increase production.

NOAA is working with the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative and other Seafood Trade Task Force agencies to develop a comprehensive seafood trade strategy. Through the implementation of E.O. 14276, NOAA aims to improve and ensure fair market conditions for U.S. seafood producers. The strategy aims to improve access to foreign markets and address unfair trade practices of foreign nations, including IUU fishing and unjustified non-tariff trade barriers, while ensuring parity for U.S. seafood producers. The strategy will build upon NOAA Fisheries' existing efforts to prevent IUU fish and fish products from entering our markets, advance U.S. seafood competitiveness and conservation objectives through bilateral and multilateral trade agreements and organizations, and engage partners to address harmful fisheries subsidies that undermine effective fisheries conservation and management.

Conclusion

We all share a collective goal of healthy fisheries that provide food for Americans, promote economic benefits to the Nation, and can be sustained for future generations. Without clear, science-based rules, fair enforcement, and a shared commitment to sustainable management, short-term pressures can easily undermine progress toward restoring the social, economic, and environmental benefits of a healthy fishery. Opportunities exist to modernize aspects of our data collection efforts, increase America's seafood competitiveness, and level the playing field for American fishers. NOAA looks forward to work with Congress on fisheries science and management issues that builds on our successes and considers the needs of fish, fishermen, ecosystems, and communities.