



# Successfully Rebuilding American Fisheries Under the Magnuson-Stevens Act

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act is working to protect and rebuild America’s ocean fish populations. Rebounding fish populations create jobs, support coastal economies, repair damaged marine ecosystems, provide increased recreational fishing opportunities and supply fresh, local seafood. In the early 1990s, many of our nation’s fish populations were in severe decline because of overfishing. In response, Congress amended the Magnuson-Stevens Act in 1996 to require that overfished populations be rebuilt in as short a time as possible, but not to exceed 10 years, with certain limited exceptions.

As a result, our nation has been making remarkable strides toward restoring overfished populations to healthy, sustainable levels, with significant economic and ecological benefits:

**34**  
fish stocks  
rebuilt since  
**2000.**<sup>1</sup>

**2/3**  
of overfished stocks  
rebuilt or making  
progress since MSA  
strengthened.<sup>2</sup>

**92%**  
increase (54 percent,  
inflation adjusted)  
in commercial  
revenues for these  
stocks since start of  
rebuilding plans.<sup>3</sup>

**14-YEAR  
RECORD HIGH**  
in U.S seafood  
landings and  
revenues in 2011  
(valued at more  
than \$5.3 billion).<sup>4</sup>

**\$58  
BILLION**  
generated in  
recreational fishing  
in sales impacts  
in 2012.<sup>5</sup>

The benefits of ending overfishing and rebuilding overfished populations are far-reaching, and the costs of delaying rebuilding are significant. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has estimated that the complete rebuilding of all U.S. stocks will increase fishermen’s dockside revenues by \$2.2 billion a year—a 42 percent increase from 2011 revenues—and produce as much as an additional \$31 billion in total sales impact supporting 500,000 new jobs.<sup>6</sup>

We must capitalize on these successes and finish the job of rebuilding valuable U.S. fish populations. Unfortunately, 40 commercially and recreationally important federally managed fish populations remain at unhealthy levels. As America’s ocean fish populations continue to rebound, Congress should reject proposals to remove or delay conservation deadlines. The existing rebuilding requirement in the law has proven effective even while being implemented in a flexible fashion. For example, the average time period in rebuilding plans to date is almost 20 years.<sup>7</sup>

Clearly, the Magnuson-Stevens Act has been an essential tool to help rebuild our fish populations and the fisheries they support. We must stay the course to ensure that more fish populations recover and that we continue to benefit from the economic gains of sustainable fisheries management.



# REBUILDING SUCCESS STORIES

## Mid-Atlantic Summer Flounder

Summer flounder, one of the most important commercial and recreational fish stocks in the Mid-Atlantic region, was reduced by overfishing to just 12 percent of its target population level in 1989.<sup>8</sup> It took years before the Magnuson-Stevens Act rebuilding requirements were enacted into law, but once a rebuilding plan was fully implemented and catch levels adequately reduced, the summer flounder stock began to recover. The stock was declared rebuilt in 2010.<sup>9</sup>



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## South Atlantic Black Sea Bass

Chronic overfishing dating back to the late 1980s prevented South Atlantic black sea bass from recovering to healthy levels for years. As overfishing was finally curtailed as part of a rebuilding plan implemented in 2006, population levels recovered. By 2013, the stock was rebuilt and catch limits were increased, allowing fishermen greater access to what has grown into a healthy population.<sup>10</sup>



© National Aquarium

## Atlantic Sea Scallop

Managers implemented a rebuilding plan for sea scallop in 1999 that cemented earlier recovery gains, including those made through the use of rotational closed areas. Within just a few years, the sea scallop stock had been rebuilt.<sup>11</sup> The U.S. Atlantic sea scallop fishery is now one of America's most valuable fisheries and the most valuable wild scallop fishery in the world.<sup>12</sup>



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## Mid-Atlantic Bluefish

In the late 1990s, officials determined that the Mid-Atlantic bluefish population had fallen to an unhealthy level. To recover this valuable fish, federal managers implemented a nine-year rebuilding plan, which reached its goal three years ahead of schedule, leading officials to declare bluefish fully rebuilt in 2007.<sup>13</sup>



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## Pacific Lingcod

When fishery managers found that lingcod off the Pacific coast were depleted, they applied science-based management measures as part of a 10-year rebuilding plan. The Pacific lingcod population was rebuilt several years ahead of schedule.<sup>14</sup>



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# MAKING PROGRESS TOWARD REBUILDING

## Gulf Red Snapper

The Gulf of Mexico red snapper population was subject to overfishing and remained depleted for decades until new conservation and management measures were implemented in 2007.<sup>15</sup> Recent stock assessments have found that Gulf red snapper are recovering, including increasing size, abundance and geographic range.<sup>16</sup> A continued commitment to rebuild red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico will continue to provide increased fishing opportunities for commercial and recreational anglers.<sup>17</sup>



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### Endnotes

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