

BRINGING BACK THE FISH:

Summary

The bounty of America's fisheries has fed a hungry nation, built homes, enticed tourists, fueled commercial enterprises, put kids through college, and provided a decent living to millions.

But in the late 1980s and 1990s, many fish stocks off our shores, from haddock in New England to summer flounder in the Mid-Atlantic to lingcod off the Pacific coast, had crashed. Catch levels were too high, fleets were increasingly efficient, and managers were reluctant to take painful but necessary steps to sustain and rebuild populations. In response to this crisis, Congress passed the Sustainable Fisheries Act (SFA) in 1996, which amended the federal fisheries law, the Magnuson-Stevens Act, to require that overfished ocean fish stocks be rebuilt in as short a time period as possible not to exceed 10 years (with certain limited exceptions).

NRDC undertook an evaluation of how effective the Magnuson-Stevens Act's rebuilding requirements have been over the last decade and a half. We examined population trajectories and other trends for all fish stocks that were subject to the requirements and for which sufficient information was available to assess rebuilding progress (a total of 44 stocks).

64 percent of U.S. fish stocks put in rebuilding plans to comply with the 1996 amendments to the Magnuson-Stevens Act have been designated rebuilt or met rebuilding targets, or have made significant rebuilding progress.



Gloucester Harbor, MA

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Our evaluation found:

- 28 of 44 fish stocks—or 64 percent—have been designated rebuilt or met their rebuilding targets, or have made significant rebuilding progress (defined below).
- Of the 28 stocks, 21 have been designated rebuilt or met rebuilding targets (and have not been designated as again approaching an overfished condition).
- The remaining 7 stocks have made significant rebuilding progress, defined as achieving at least 50 percent of the rebuilding target and a 25 percent increase in abundance since the start of its rebuilding plan.
- Estimated average annual 2008-2010 gross commercial revenues from these 28 rebuilding successes totaled almost \$585 million—92 percent higher (54 percent when adjusted for inflation) than revenues at the start of rebuilding.
- 8 stocks have made limited rebuilding progress (either achieving 50 percent of their target or a 25 percent increase in abundance) and 8 stocks have shown a lack of rebuilding progress (achieving neither of these thresholds).
- Areas of concern include (a) gaps in the application of the rebuilding requirements, such as for stocks that are not federally managed, are of “unknown” population status or are internationally managed; (b) regions, such as New England, the South Atlantic, and the Gulf of Mexico, with significant proportions of stocks showing a lack of rebuilding progress; and (c) continued overfishing during rebuilding plans.



For more information, please contact:

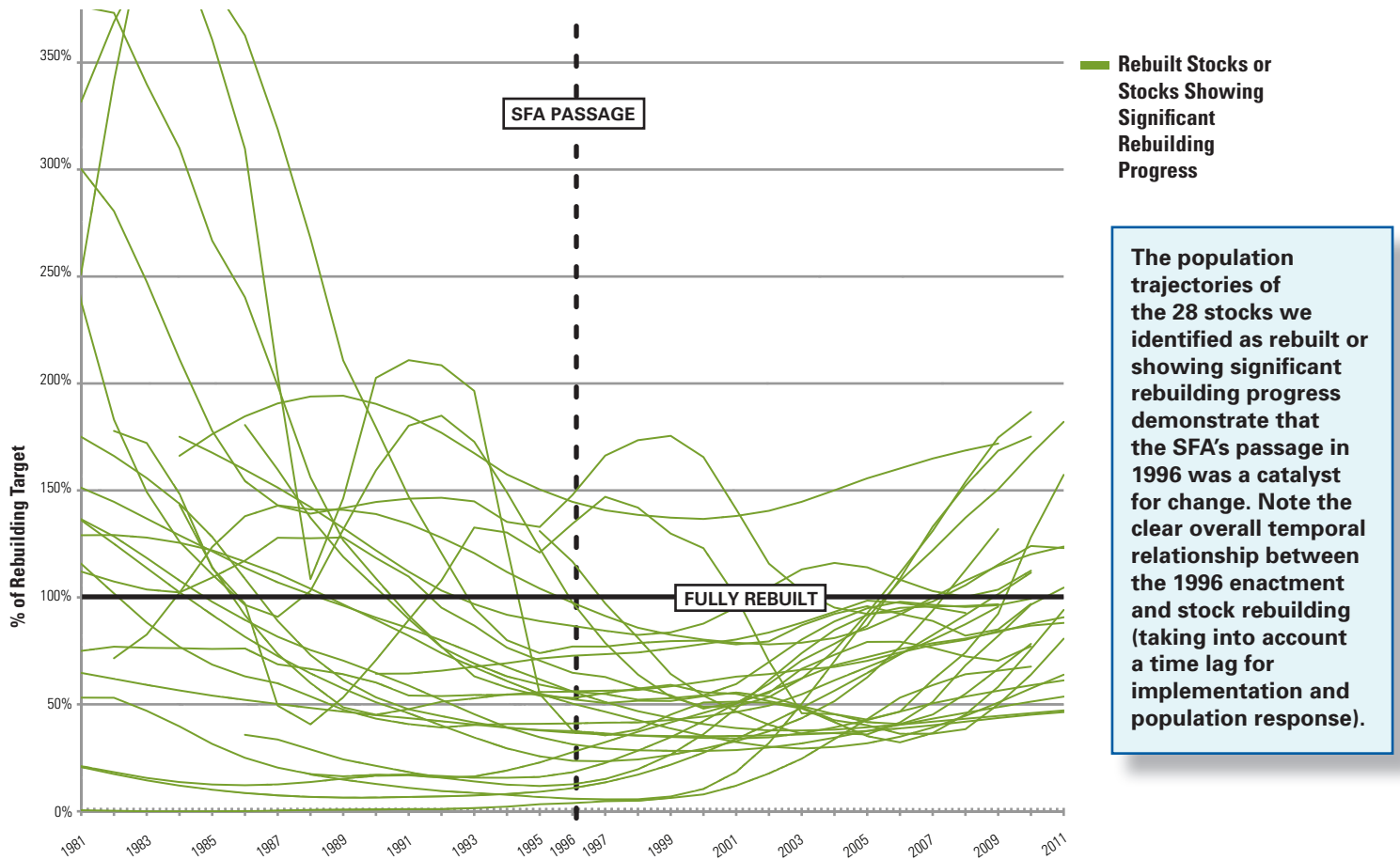
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In Bringing Back the Fish: An Evaluation of U.S. Fisheries Rebuilding Under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, NRDC evaluated all U.S. ocean fish stocks put in rebuilding plans under Section 304(e) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act with sufficient information to evaluate progress (44 stocks). For a complete discussion of the evaluation, including regional breakdowns, please see the full report at www.nrdc.org/oceans/rebuilding-fisheries.asp.



Showing 5-year moving averages.

Source: NRDC, *Bringing Back the Fish: An Evaluation of U.S. Fisheries Rebuilding Under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act* (February 2013). www.nrdc.org/oceans/rebuilding-fisheries.asp.

A FISHERMAN'S PERSPECTIVE:

"I didn't bother fishing for summer flounder or black sea bass until the fisheries rebuilt. The overall impact is that there are more fish around than ever."

– John McMurray, New York harbor charter boat captain.

"We are seeing more and more canary and yelloweye rockfish, and it's obvious to the guy out on the water that things are improving, and that's good. Because as my father used to tell me, 'I'd hate to be the guy who caught the very last of these fish.'"

– Dan Wolford, recreational fisherman from Los Gatos, CA.

"We thought whatever we caught would come back—that's what I was taught in school. But there were too many people fishing. I fished on it until in my opinion it completely collapsed."

– Mike Newman, southeast Florida charter boat owner and former commercial fisherman.

"There's been a long history here of taking a lot of fish and kicking the can down the road. I think we'll be lucky if we catch 50 percent of the cod that scientists tell us we're allowed to catch this year. We are at a period right now where there's some pretty deep concern those fish are gone."

– John Pappalardo, CEO of the Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fisherman's Association.



Assateague Island, MD

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