FACT SHEET

HOW THE MAGNUSON-STEVENS ACT IS HELPING REBUILD U.S. FISHERIES

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), first enacted in 1976, is working to protect and rebuild the United States' ocean fish and shellfish populations.[1] Rebounding fish populations create jobs, support coastal economies, repair damaged marine ecosystems, improve ocean resilience to climate change, and increase recreational fishing opportunities.

In the early 1990s, many of our nation's fish populations were in decline or depleted because of overfishing. In response, Congress amended the MSA in 1996, requiring managers to develop rebuilding plans for all overfished stocks. **These plans must ensure that overfished stocks are rebuilt to sustainable levels in as short a time as possible, not to exceed 10 years, with certain exceptions.** Because of the MSA's rebuilding mandate and the guideposts it provides, our nation has made remarkable strides toward restoring overfished populations to healthy, sustainable levels.

The MSA is working to bring back our fisheries—and with them, significant ecological and economic benefits. For example:

43
FISH STOCKS REBUILT SINCE 2000.[2]

2/3
OF OVERFISHED STOCKS WERE REBUILT OR MADE SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS BY 2013.[3]

BY 2010, REBUILDING OF 28 FISH STOCKS RESULTED IN A
54%
INCREASE (ADJUSTED FOR INFLATION) IN COMMERCIAL REVENUES.[4]

SEAFOOD LANDINGS ARE TRENDING UP. IN 2015, U.S. COMMERCIAL FISHERMEN LANDED 9.7 BILLION POUNDS OF FISH VALUED AT $5.2 BILLION. **THIS IS A 17% INCREASE** IN VALUE FROM 2006 LANDINGS, ADJUSTING FOR INFLATION.[5]

$63 BILLION
IN RECREATIONAL FISHING SALES GENERATED IN 2015, SUPPORTING AN ESTIMATED 439,000 JOBS.[6]

Rebuilding our ocean fish populations back to healthy levels benefits not only fish and fishermen, but also the larger seafood economy, which includes chefs, restaurants, retailers, and other businesses that rely on a steady supply of seafood. As consumers increasingly demand sustainably managed and caught seafood, several conservation requirements in the MSA are providing a win for both business owners and their customers.[7] In 2016, U.S. consumers spent an estimated $93 billion on fishery products, including more than $63 billion in restaurants and other food service establishments.[8]

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JANUARY 2018
FS-17-11-B

The benefits of ending overfishing and rebuilding overfished populations are far-reaching, and the costs of delay are significant.

In 2011, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) estimated that rebuilding all U.S. fish stocks would generate an additional $31 billion in seafood sales, support an additional 500,000 jobs, and increase by $2.2 billion the revenue that fishermen receive at the dock.[9] In contrast, delaying rebuilding actions would increase the risk of overfished stocks collapsing entirely. Such delays could require steeper and lengthier catch reductions for the stock to fully recover, thus exacerbating the economic burden on fishing communities.[10]

We must capitalize on our successes to date and finish the job of rebuilding valuable U.S. fish populations as quickly as possible. Despite demonstrable successes under the MSA, there remains much work to be done. As of 2017, 38 commercially and recreationally important, federally-managed species of known status remain at unhealthy levels.[11] Systemic problems remain, such as bycatch (i.e., unintended catch), destructive fishing practices that damage marine habitat, and loopholes that leave hundreds of ecologically important fish species poorly managed or unmanaged under a federal plan.

As the United States' ocean fish populations continue to rebound, Congress should reject proposals to weaken rebuilding standards or delay timelines to rebuild overfished stocks.

The existing rebuilding requirement in the law has proved effective for many different fish stocks. The law already allows managers to tailor rebuilding plans to a fish stock's specific biological and ecological needs. As a result, more than half of all rebuilding plans have a schedule longer than the 10-year default time frame; in fact, the average time for rebuilding is almost 20 years.[12] In addition, NOAA Fisheries recently revised its guidelines and made several significant changes, supported by regional management councils, to how rebuilding plans are carried out.[13] Legislative proposals to weaken or undermine the very requirements that are driving the restoration of U.S. fisheries are misguided and will lead to failed rebuilding plans—and lost jobs.

The MSA is a critical tool for rebuilding our fish populations and the fisheries they support. We must stay the course to ensure that fish populations recover and that we continue to benefit from the economic gains of more sustainable fisheries management. Now is the time to build on our progress toward healthy fisheries, rather than weaken the federal management system that has allowed so many U.S. fisheries to recover. The following stories show how well-implemented rebuilding plans have succeeded in recovering fish populations and generating economic gains.

REBUILDING SUCCESS STORIES

ATLANTIC SEA SCALLOPS

In 1998, fishery managers implemented a rebuilding plan for sea scallops that built on earlier recovery gains, including those made through the use of landscape-scale closed areas. Within just a few years, the sea scallop stock was rebuilt.[14] The U.S. Atlantic sea scallop fishery is now one of the country's most valuable fisheries and the most valuable wild scallop fishery in the world.[15] In 2016, landings of U.S. Atlantic sea scallops exceeded 40 million pounds—more than triple the 13.1 million pounds landed in 1998—and were valued at over $480 million.[16]

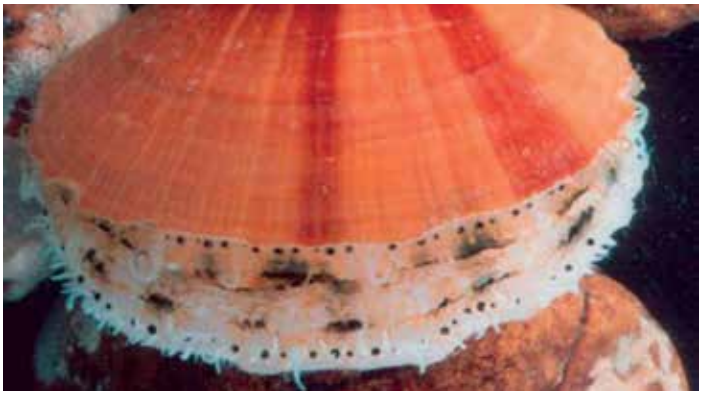

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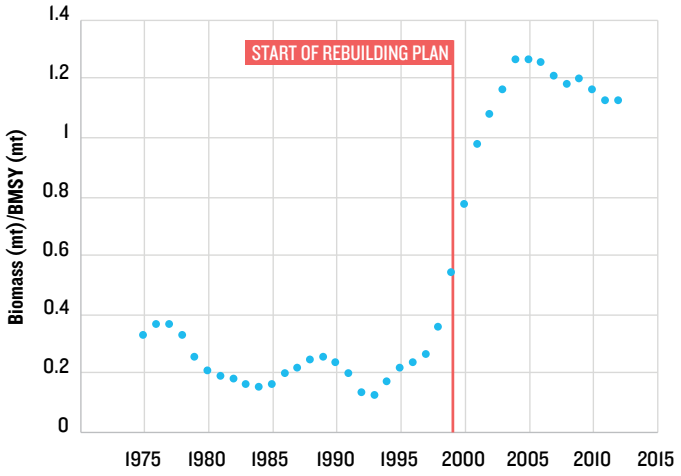
FIGURE I. ATLANTIC SEA SCALLOP REBUILDING TREND

Standardized biomass, represented as the ratio of total observed biomass to the biomass that would produce maximum sustainable yield (BMSY). Biomass estimates are given in metric tons (mt) of meat weight, based on 1976–2013 stock assessment data.[17]

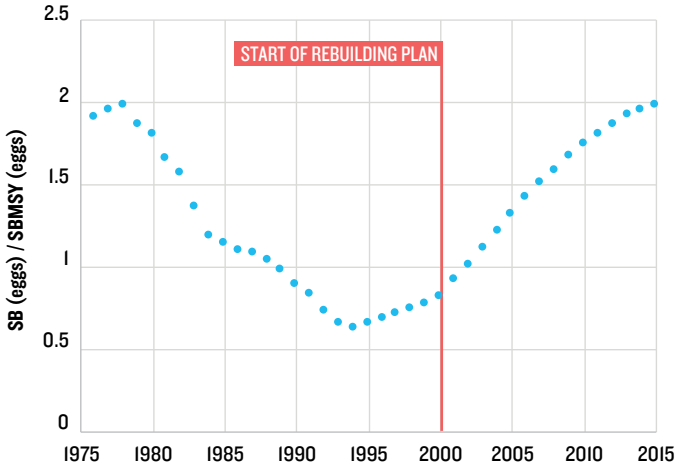


PACIFIC CANARY ROCKFISH

An important recreational and commercial species, the canary rockfish was declared overfished in 2000.[18] This is a slow-growing and long-living species—it can live up to 75 years—which makes rebuilding a challenge.[19] However, in 2015, the government's scientific assessment showed that canary rockfish had been rebuilt ahead of schedule. Today it has been estimated that there are six times more canary rockfish in the Pacific region than there were in 2001.[20] As a result of this rebuilding success, fishermen can look forward to higher canary rockfish catch limits and fewer restrictions when fishing for other groundfish species.

FIGURE 2. PACIFIC CANARY ROCKFISH REBUILDING TREND

Standardized biomass, represented as the ratio of observed spawning biomass (SB) output to the spawning biomass output that would produce maximum sustainable yield (SBMSY). Biomass estimates are given in millions of eggs, based on 1976–2015 stock assessment data.[21]

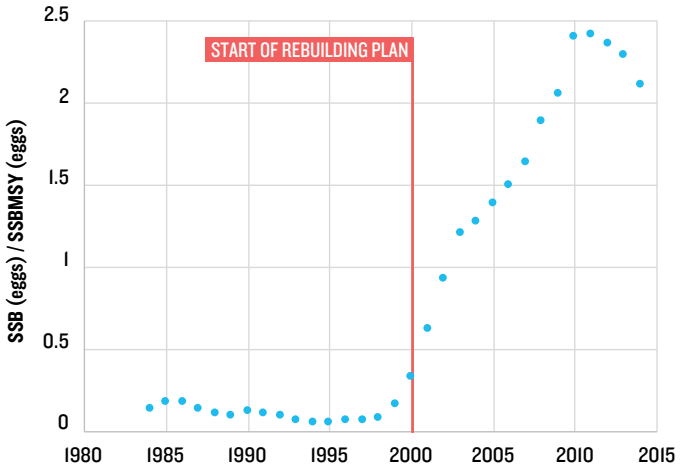


ATLANTIC SCUP

The U.S. scup fishery ranges from North Carolina to Maine. Because scup are migratory and move between federal and state waters, the fishery is jointly overseen by the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. Scup, also commonly known as porgy, are increasingly sought after by both commercial and recreational fishermen. The scup population hit an all-time low in 1995 at just 4 percent of a healthy level, and rebuilding efforts were implemented in 2000.[22] As of 2009, the scup fishery was declared successfully rebuilt. Fishermen have since benefited from the stock's rapid recovery; in 2015, commercial fishermen in the mid-Atlantic landed 16.95 million pounds of scup, compared with 9.24 million pounds in 2007.[23]

FIGURE 3. ATLANTIC SCUP REBUILDING TREND

Standardized biomass, represented as the ratio of observed spawning stock biomass (SSB) to the spawning stock biomass that would produce maximum sustainable yield (SSBMSY). Biomass estimates are given in metric tons (mt) of mature spawning females based on 1984–2014 stock assessment data.[24]



PACIFIC LINGCOD

The largest of the major West Coast groundfish species, the Pacific lingcod (nicknamed "buckethead" for its large head) ranges from Baja California to the Gulf of Alaska. In 1999, fishery managers determined that both northern and southern portions of the lingcod stock were depleted.[25] The Pacific Fishery Management Council implemented a rebuilding plan and reduced catch levels, and the Pacific lingcod population was declared rebuilt in 2005.[26] In 2016, more than 1.4 million pounds of lingcod valued in excess of $2.1 million were harvested from the West Coast and Alaska.[27]

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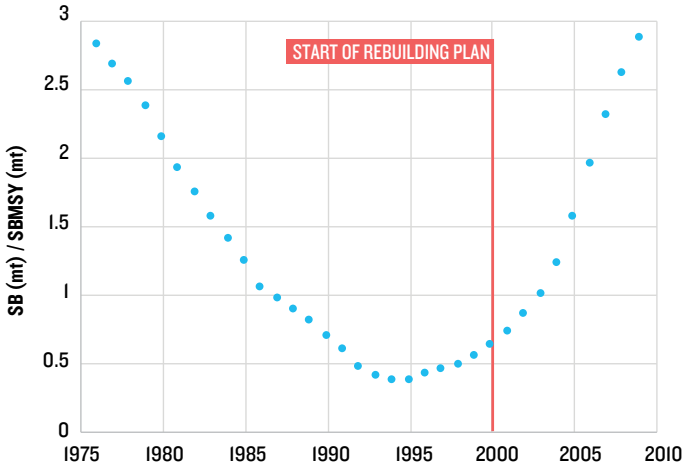
FIGURE 4. PACIFIC LINGCOD REBUILDING TREND

Standardized biomass, represented as the ratio of observed spawning biomass (SB) to the spawning biomass that would produce maximum sustainable yield (SBMSY). Biomass estimates are given in metric tons (mt) of mature spawning females, based on 1976–2009 stock assessment data.[28]



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ENDNOTES

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