



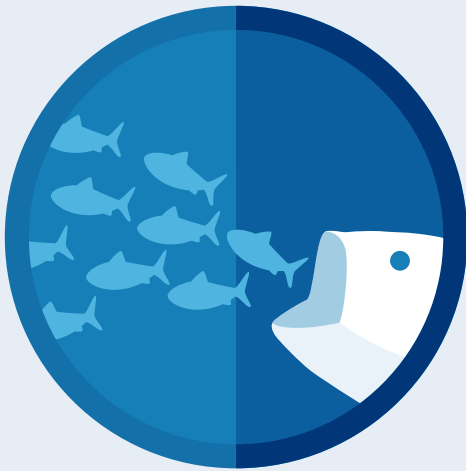
Five Ways to Help Fish and the Oceans

Congress should look at the big picture when updating federal fisheries law

Forty years after the Magnuson-Stevens Act became law, we've learned much about the ocean and fisheries.

That knowledge supports shifting fisheries management from a single-species focus to a big-picture approach that views fish as part of the larger environment—where they live, what they eat, and how pollution and other threats affect them. To help ensure healthy oceans, regional fishery management councils should set rules that consider all we know about fish and marine ecosystems. For example, along with setting catch limits, councils should develop plans that safeguard baitfish, which feed larger species, and protect essential fish habitat. When Congress renews the law, it should emphasize this approach.





Prey

Conserve baitfish by setting science-based limits on their catch to ensure enough remain in the water to serve as food for marine life, including larger fish.

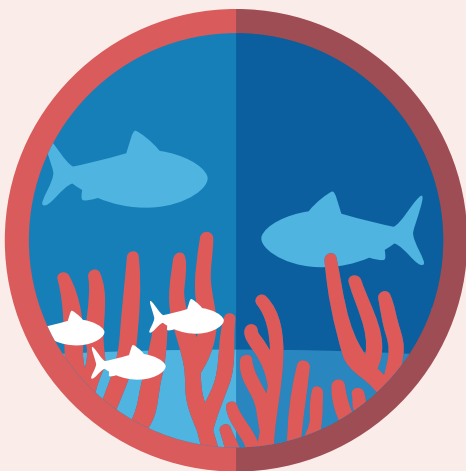
Menhaden are a meal for humpback whales, and anchovies serve as more than a pizza topping. These forage fish play critical roles in ocean food webs. Yet current fishing limits do not ensure that enough menhaden in the Northeast and anchovies in the Pacific remain in the water to feed their many predators. Several fishery councils are taking steps to protect these small species, but more must be done across the nation.



Bycatch

Minimize bycatch through actions such as improved commercial fishing techniques to help prevent catch of non-targeted animals, including turtles, dolphins, and many fish species.

Almost a fifth of fish caught in American waters are unintentional “bycatch.” Those fish are often thrown overboard dead or dying. One Oregon entrepreneur responded by working with fishermen and scientists to devise nets that reduce wasted catch. In the Northeast, acoustic systems on some fishing nets sound every few seconds to help harbor porpoises steer clear, reducing net deaths by 90 percent. Congress should strengthen requirements to reduce bycatch.



Habitat

Protect fish habitat by safeguarding key areas from damaging activities—pollution, dredging, and fishing on spawning species—to boost fish populations and help ensure healthy oceans.

Corals and underwater mountains are marine life meccas. The Bajo de Sico seamount off western Puerto Rico draws such important breeding fish that Caribbean managers restrict some fishing there during spawning time. In the mid-Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico, deep-water corals play host to sharks, crabs, and many fish. Threats to fragile corals range from warming waters to the use of destructive fishing gear. Congress should update the law to better protect places where fish shelter and reproduce.



Proceed with caution

Keep fishing sustainable from the start by requiring managers to use scientific data when deciding whether to allow fishing—and how much—in new areas or on new species.

In the U.S. Arctic, where sea ice melt is opening access to resources once out of reach, managers halted new fisheries in a large area until adequate knowledge could inform smart decisions. In the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico, managers are waiting to learn more about goliath grouper, which are recovering from overfishing and habitat loss, before allowing fishing that could harm the recovery. Congress should encourage this kind of careful planning.



Ecosystem

Require fishery ecosystem plans from each regional council to guide decisions using the latest science about what affects fish, such as habitat and food supply, and how fishing impacts other fisheries and ecosystems.

Pacific managers adopted a fishery ecosystem plan that incorporates into decisions information on how fish populations are connected to other elements in the California Current. In the Caribbean, managers are working to tailor fishing rules to the habits, culture, and seafood preferences of the region's diverse people and locations. Congress should require such approaches as standard practice.

For further information, please visit:

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