

ROLL OUT PLAN FOR

The public release of the agency's *2017 Report to Congress on the Status of U.S. Fisheries*, also called the "*Status of Stocks*" report

Action: NOAA Fisheries will release its *2017 Status of Stocks* report, an important annual document highlighting the continued rebuilding and recovery of U.S. fisheries.

Date: May 2018

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Subject Matter Expert:

- NOAA Fisheries Office of Sustainable Fisheries – Karen Greene

Audiences: Congress; regional fishery management councils; fisheries commissions; state, local and tribal natural resource/fishery managers; the commercial and recreational fishing industries; conservation organizations; seafood suppliers; retail food industry; other non-government groups; national and regional media; industry-specific media and business/economics reporters; and communities with working waterfronts.

Key Messages:

- Our Status of the Stocks report for 2017 shows that we continue to see positive progress in rebuilding our nation's fish stocks. The number of stocks on the overfished list reached an all-time low, and the number of stocks on the overfishing list remained near all-time lows.
- Under the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the United States has become an international leader in fisheries management.
- Our dynamic, science-based management process is proving successful at ending overfishing and rebuilding stocks and helping us realize significant benefits to the U.S. economy.

Plan Summary and Schedule:

May 15, 2018/2 Days before Release: (in succession)

- Send AA email to NOAA Fisheries Leadership Council. (Read)
- Send courtesy e-mail and advance embargoed copy of Status of Stocks report to Congressional staff for the House Natural Resources, House Appropriations, Senate Commerce and Senate Appropriations Committees. (Holmes)

May 16, 2018/1 Day before Release:

- Send advisory publicizing media availability. (Brogan)

May 17, 2018/Day of Release: (in succession)

Morning, starting at 9 AM EST:

- Send email to Congressional staff – announcing the report, providing electronic copy of Status of Stocks, and noting the Congressional webinar in the coming weeks. (Holmes/Woolcott/Lizama)
- Report is posted live online. (Ellis/Gamble)
<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/2017-report-congress-status-us-fisheries>
- Send emails from AA to Fishery Management Councils, Fisheries Commissions and Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee, state directors, and select key recreational contacts, noting results, providing links to Status of Stocks. (Read)
- Send national press release. (Brogan)
- Begin social media postings. (Ellis/Swartz)

- **1 PM EST:** Press call with NOAA Fisheries Leadership and experts (Alan Risenhoover, Stephanie Hunt, Karen Greene). (Brogan)
- Notify external audience via e-mail announcement/s to stakeholders. (Bryant/others TBD)
- Parallel activities as appropriate in the Regions. (i.e. distribute regional press materials if applicable)

Date TBD:

- Alan Risenhoover conducts Congressional webinar (Holmes/Guidon)

Ongoing following rollout:

- Include as FishNews Blurb. (Bryant)
- Fisheries Public Affairs responds to press inquiries as needed. (Brogan)
- Fisheries External Affairs responds to stakeholder inquiries as needed. (Bryant/Gamble)
- Report statistics included in Agency Leadership remarks for the next several months at pre-planned events. (All HQ and RCC comms leads)

Materials:

- E-mails from AA to:
 - Fisheries Leadership Council (Greene)
 - MAFAC, FMCs, Commissions and State Directors members (Greene)
- Advance email to Hill and day-of email to Hill with invitation to briefing (OLIA)
- Fisheries-level webpage featuring info/links to documents (Ellis/Swartz)
- NOAA Media Advisory (Brogan)
- NOAA Press Release (Brogan)
- Social Media Plan (Ellis/Gamble/Regional Comms Council)
- Congressional PowerPoint (Greene)
- Q&As (attached) (Greene)
- Species by species list of status changes (attached) (Greene)
- The *2017 Status of the Stocks Report* in hard copy and electronic (Gamble)
- Infographics (Comms Office)
- Status of Stocks webpage (Gamble)

Key Messages & Talking Points:

Our Status of the Stocks report for 2017 shows that we continue to see positive progress in rebuilding our nation's fish stocks. The number of stocks on the overfished list reached an all-time low, and the number of stocks on the overfishing list remained near all-time lows.

- In 2017, U.S. fisheries continued to rebuild, the number of stocks on the overfished list reached an all-time low, and the number of stocks on the overfishing list remained near all-time lows.
- The 2017 *Status of the Stocks Report to Congress* provides a “snapshot in time” of the status of our nation's fisheries at the end of 2017 in relation to stocks that are on the overfishing and overfished lists. (The report does not capture the actions developed in response to these determinations.)
- The number of rebuilt stocks since 2000 increased to 44. In 2017, three previously overfished stocks were rebuilt :
 - Bocaccio - Southern Pacific Coast
 - Darkblotched rockfish - Pacific Coast
 - Pacific ocean perch – Pacific Coast
- At the end of 2017, the overfishing list included 30 stocks and the overfished list included 35 stocks. 91 percent of the stocks are not subject to overfishing and 87 percent are not overfished.

Under the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the United States has become an international leader in fisheries management.

- Sustainable U.S. fisheries play an important role in the nation's economy providing opportunities for commercial, recreational, and subsistence fishing, and sustainable seafood for consumers. By ending overfishing and rebuilding stocks, we are strengthening the value of U.S. fisheries to the economy, our communities, and marine ecosystems.
- Managing fisheries sustainably is an adaptive process that relies on sound science, innovative management approaches, effective enforcement, meaningful partnerships, and robust public participation.
- We regularly track more than 470 stocks or stock complexes to determine their status. Continuous monitoring and improvement of our knowledge about the status of stocks is key to ongoing sustainable fisheries management under the MSA.
- NOAA Fisheries and our many partners continue to build on the United States' successful management approach by advancing policies and plans that will help us meet the challenges of today and tomorrow.

Our dynamic, science-based management process is proving successful at ending overfishing and rebuilding stocks and helping us realize significant benefits to the U.S. economy.

- Commercial and recreational fishing are big business, culturally important, and support a significant number of jobs.

- At the national level, U.S. commercial fishing and seafood industry and recreational fishing generated \$208 billion in sales impacts, contributed \$97 billion to gross domestic product (GDP), and supported 1.6 million full- and part-time jobs in fishing and across the broader economy. (FEUS 2015)
- Saltwater angling generated \$63 billion in sales impacts (up 5% from 2014) and contributed \$36 billion to GDP (up 2% from 2014) in the marine recreational fishing industry and across the broader economy. Job impacts remained steady from 2014 at 439,000 jobs. (FEUS 2015)
- The continued positive impact of U.S. fisheries on the economy, especially between 2011 and 2015, reflects the collective progress that NOAA Fisheries, the regional fishery management councils, and our stakeholders are making as we work to fully rebuild our nation's fish stocks and ensure the long-term economic stability of our fisheries and our fishing and seafood communities. (FEUS 2015)

Questions and Answers:

Q: What is Status of the Stocks Report and why does NOAA Fisheries report out on this every year?

A: In the annual Status of Stocks report, NOAA Fisheries reports on the status of U.S. fisheries, providing information on whether a stock is overfished, subject to overfishing, or has been rebuilt. Reporting on the status of fish stocks provides Congress, fisheries managers, and the public with an account of how well current fisheries management measures are working.

Q: Why does a stock change status within a given year or between years?

A: Fish stock status can fluctuate due to both fishing effects and/or natural or environmental factors. Our knowledge about fish populations is also regularly improving, so updates in assessment methods can result in a status change. Information from new assessments, updated assessments, current landings estimates, and new survey data, are constantly being produced and may improve our understanding about fish stocks and the best methods and models to use to determine stocks status. In addition, the councils may revise status determination criteria (i.e., the definitions for when a stock is overfished or subject to overfishing) in response to this improved information. For these reasons, it is normal, expected, and even desired, for stock status changes to occur because they must reflect the best scientific information available.

Q: What does overfishing mean?

A: A stock that is subject to overfishing has a fishing mortality (harvest) rate that is too high to produce its maximum sustainable yield. A determination of overfishing does not necessarily mean that the fishery is not sustainable or that the stock or its ecosystem is being impaired. These negative outcomes are associated with high levels of overfishing over a period of many years. Current management approaches, including annual catch limits to prevent overfishing and accountability measures that respond to overfishing if it does occur, greatly reduce the likelihood that damaging levels of overfishing will occur. Of the 317 stocks or stock complexes for which an overfishing determination could be made, 30 (9 percent) are subject to overfishing and 287 (91 percent) are not subject to overfishing.

Q: What does it mean to be overfished?

A: A stock that is overfished has a biomass level depleted to a degree that the stock's capacity to produce the maximum sustainable yield is jeopardized. In some cases overfishing is the main cause for the depleted stock, but other factors can affect the abundance of a fish stock and lead to an overfished listing. These include abnormal levels of disease, extreme population cycles, habitat degradation, and environmental changes such as climate, ocean acidification, and land-based pollution. When we determine that a stock is overfished, the council must implement a plan to rebuild it to the level that can support the maximum sustainable yield. Of the 235 stocks or stock complexes for which an overfished determination could be made, 35 (15 percent) are overfished and 200 (85 percent) are not overfished.

Q: What does it mean to be rebuilt?

A: Rebuilt means that a previously overfished stock has increased in abundance to the target level that supports its maximum sustainable yield, or maximum sustainable yield. Three stocks

were declared fully rebuilt to the level that supports the target level, bringing the total number of stocks rebuilt since 2000 to 44. Stocks rebuilt in 2017 include:

- Bocaccio - Southern Pacific Coast
- Darkblotched rockfish - Pacific Coast
- Pacific ocean perch – Pacific Coast

Q: Why is the overfished status of Atlantic Bluefin tuna now unknown (was previously overfished) and will it continue to be managed under a rebuilding plan?

A: Previous bluefin tuna stock assessments relied on two widely divergent stock recruitment scenarios. The most recent assessment completed in 2017, was abandoned because of the continued lack of evidence to support one recruitment scenario over the other, and the inability to calculate biomass-based reference points to estimate stock size. For these reasons, the stock status changed to unknown. For 2018-2020, the stock will be managed under an interim conservation and management plan, until a future approach is adopted, which will include new management procedures recommended by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT).

Q: Why is the overfishing status of witch flounder now unknown (was previously subject to overfishing) and how does management change with this unknown status?

A: A stock assessment using a new approach was completed in 2017, but the findings to support an overfishing determination were rejected by the peer review because of scientific uncertainty. This is mostly due to a major retrospective pattern in the data, which leads to an underestimation of fishing mortality and overestimation of biomass. The previous stock assessment approach was also attempted, using more recent data, but the findings were too uncertain to recommend overfishing status. Although overfishing status is officially unknown, the stock has not exceeded the annual catch limit (ACL) for the last five years.

Q: Why are Gulf of Mexico red snapper and Gulf of Mexico gray triggerfish no longer overfished (still rebuilding) even though they were not assessed in 2017?

A: In this year's report, the status of Gulf of Mexico red snapper and Gulf of Mexico gray triggerfish changed from "overfished" to "not overfished (still rebuilding)" because the overfished stock status criteria were revised in a recent fishery management plan amendment. The criteria are now a more reliable indicator of whether a stock is overfished. In addition, the new criteria are less likely to cause a change in stock status due to changes in scientific uncertainty or natural fluctuations in stock size. The revised criteria were applied to the most recent assessments that were conducted for red snapper (2015) and gray triggerfish (2015). Both stocks will continue to remain in their rebuilding plans until they rebuild to the target level that supports the maximum sustainable yield.

Q: Why was there a record number of assessments in fiscal year 2017 compared to previous years?

A: Increases in funding over the last 10 or more years has enabled NOAA Fisheries to increase production of stock assessments. In FY17, several West coast groundfish species were split into geographic sub-stocks, which increased the number of stocks assessed in that region. Additionally, NOAA Fisheries completed 31 first time robust data-limited assessments, primarily of data-limited reef species. These assessments were subsidized, in-part, by NOAA Coral Reef

Conservation Program funds, using data collected by fisheries independent surveys initiated in 2005.

Q: What is an Annual Catch Limit?

A: An Annual Catch Limit is the level of catch set each year within a fishery management plan that prevents or ensures that overfishing does not occur. If an Annual Catch Limit is exceeded or anticipated to be exceeded, accountability measures kick in to prevent or mitigate overfishing. These accountability measures greatly reduce the likelihood that damaging levels of overfishing will occur.

Q. What is NOAA Fisheries doing to address overfishing for the 6 stocks added to the overfishing list?

A. For domestic stocks, as required by the MSA management framework, we are working with the councils to implement management measures to immediately end overfishing and rebuild all stocks added to the overfishing and overfished lists. Two of the stocks added to the overfishing list in 2017 are managed under international agreements and have a U.S. quota that is only a small portion of the overall allowable catch. For these stocks we ensure our catch levels stay within the U.S. quota. We also work through international organizations to encourage other countries to take steps to prevent future overfishing internationally.

Q. Are US fisheries managers adapting science and management processes to reflect changing ocean conditions?

A. Yes, we continually adapt our science and management process to address changing ocean conditions. For example:

- NOAA scientists are conducting fish climate vulnerability assessments to identify which species and fishing communities may be most susceptible to environmental change.
- NOAA Fisheries has increased the use of modeling tools such as management strategy evaluations to assess how environmental variability and species interactions affect fisheries management.
- We have also developed ecosystem indicators that can be tracked and reported alongside stock assessments, often in the form of ecosystem status reports.

Appendix – Species by species list of changes.

OVERFISHING LIST	
<i>Six stocks were removed from the overfishing list:</i>	<i>Six stocks were added to the overfishing list:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sailfish - Western Atlantic • Blue king crab – Pribilof Islands • Puerto Rico Wrasses Complex • Coho salmon - Puget Sound: Hood Canal¹ • Winter flounder – Georges Bank • Witch flounder - Northwestern Atlantic Coast (now unknown) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater amberjack - Gulf of Mexico • Red grouper - Southern Atlantic Coast • Coho salmon - Puget Sound: Stillaguamish¹ • Shortfin mako - North Atlantic¹ • Red hake - Southern Georges Bank / Mid-Atlantic • Gray triggerfish – Gulf of Mexico
Nine percent of stocks are on the overfishing list – compared to 9 percent in 2016.	
OVERFISHED LIST	
<i>Six stocks were removed from the overfished list:</i>	<i>Three stocks were added to the overfished list:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yelloweye rockfish – Pacific coast • Winter flounder – Georges Bank • Gray triggerfish – Gulf of Mexico • Red snapper – Gulf of Mexico • Pacific ocean perch – Pacific Coast • Bluefin tuna – Western Atlantic (now unknown) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Red grouper - Southern Atlantic Coast • Shortfin mako – North Atlantic¹ • Red hake - Southern Georges Bank / Mid-Atlantic
Fifteen percent of stocks are on the overfished list – compared to sixteen percent in 2016.	
REBUILT	
Bocaccio - Southern Pacific Coast Darkblotched rockfish— Pacific Coast Pacific ocean perch – Pacific Coast	
FIRST TIME STATUS DETERMINATIONS	
<i>The following stocks are NOT subject to overfishing based on first-time information.</i>	<i>The following stocks are NOT overfished based on first-time information.</i>
Spiny dogfish – Pacific coast St. Croix Wrasses Complex	Golden king crab – Aleutian Islands

¹ Stocks fished by both U.S. and international fleets.

Email from Chris Oliver to Fisheries Leadership:

Good morning/Good afternoon – I am getting in touch to let you know that on Thursday 5/17, NOAA Fisheries will release the 2017 *Status of U.S. Fisheries* report (embargoed copy attached). The reports and other support materials will be available online on our [homepage](#). We have a robust rollout planned for the report, including a national press call at 1 pm EST on Thursday, 5/17. Please check with you Regional Communications Council lead to find out more about what's planned and how you can help.

Email from Chris Oliver to the FMCs, Commissions, State Directors:

Good morning/Good afternoon – I am getting in touch to highlight the new report NOAA Fisheries released today, which measures the progress the nation has made in ending overfishing, rebuilding historically overfished stocks, and helping our fishing communities succeed. Our annual *Status of U.S. Fisheries* report and supporting materials are available [online](#) on the NOAA Fisheries' website.

The 2017 Status of U.S. Fisheries reflects our collective continued progress in rebuilding stocks. It also finds that the number of stocks on the overfished list is at an all-time low and stocks on the overfishing list remains near all-time lows. In 2017, 91 percent of stocks were not subject to overfishing and 87 percent of stocks were not overfished. We are also pleased to report that last year three additional stocks were rebuilt: bocaccio (Southern Pacific Coast), darkblotched rockfish (Pacific Coast), and Pacific ocean perch (Pacific Coast). This brings the total stocks rebuilt since 2000 to 44.

This report continues to highlight the success that can be achieved using sound science, innovative management approaches, effective enforcement, meaningful partnerships, and robust public participation. Under the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the United States has become an international leader in fisheries management. Our dynamic, science-based management process is proving successful in ending overfishing and rebuilding stocks, and in helping us attain significant benefits to the U.S. economy.