



Fishery Science Improvement Act

Fact Sheet

The Fishery Science Improvement Act enables National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) to manage marine fisheries based on sound science. Scientific management should be the cornerstone of fisheries management at NOAA. However, the agency has felt compelled by statutory deadlines to make major fishery management decisions using inadequate data and incomplete analysis. NOAA Fisheries is simply making guesses in many cases when setting catch limits and in determining other management parameters, and guesswork should have no place in federal fisheries management.

As amended in 2006, the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) requires Regional Fishery Management Councils to put in place annual catch limits (ACLs) and accountability measures (AMs) for every fishery by December 31, 2011. NOAA has interpreted this requirement to apply to every stock of fish under management, leaving Councils with the conundrum of either deleting stocks from management or applying highly restrictive ACLs based on very poor – or in some cases non-existent – data. NOAA presently has about 528 stocks of fish or complexes of fish under management. And they have updated stock assessment data on only 110. The Fishery Science Improvement Act (FSIA) removes the requirement to implement annual catch limits and accountability measures on stocks for which there is inadequate data and no evidence of overfishing. The legislation has three key areas which allow NOAA Fisheries to better conform to the intent of the 2006 reauthorization of Magnuson Stevens: ending overfishing based on sound scientific management.

Scientific Stock Assessments

The legislation directs NOAA Fisheries to set annual catch limits (ACLs) and accountability measures (AMs) only on those stocks of fish for which they have up-to-date scientific information to inform that decision. The two conditions exempting a fishery from the ACL requirements are 1) the lack of a stock assessment in the prior five years and 2) the absence of any indication that overfishing is occurring. Under the agency's interpretation of current law, it is planning to establish ACLs on **all** stocks under management whether or not scientific information exists on the health of the stock. FSIA ensures the agency can manage to the science they have.

Ecosystem Stocks

FSIA transitions NOAA Fisheries and the Regional Fishery Management Councils to a science-based fishery management framework. With so many stocks of fish lacking sound scientific data, the agency is currently forced to either remove individual stocks from management or move only selected stocks to an administratively-created ecosystem management category. This bill authorizes the Administration's informal guidance and broadens the criteria for the designation of a stock's inclusion in the ecosystem category.

Extension of Deadline for Non-overfished Stocks

NOAA Fisheries is preparing to set ACLs and AMs for some 528 stocks of fish to meet the deadline of December 31, 2011. FSIA extends the 2011 deadline to 2014 for stocks of fish that are not overfished and allows the agency to implement the Act.

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