

The Magnuson-Stevens Act

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) is the primary law that governs fishing in U.S. ocean waters.

Considered to be one of the most effective fishery management laws in the world, it is a critical tool that has helped build sustainable marine fisheries that underpin healthy ocean environments and vibrant coastal communities in the U.S.

ABOUT THE MSA

First passed in 1976, the MSA has, over time, prevented overfishing, protected healthy habitats, and brought fish populations back from the brink. When Congress reauthorized the law in 1996 and 2006, lawmakers empowered managers to use the latest science to set annual catch limits that maintain healthy fish populations and rebound overfished species. All of this progress has contributed to healthier fisheries and ocean ecosystems that power coastal economies.

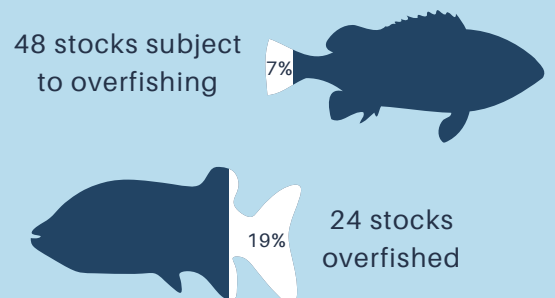
Today, our fisheries are facing serious threats as fish populations decline and climate change dramatically alters the health of the ocean. Now more than ever, we need to keep moving forward, not backwards.

WHAT'S AT STAKE



To protect U.S. fisheries and the coastal communities that rely on them, we must adapt our fishery management system to meet the challenges of today and defend the MSA from dangerous rollbacks.

As of the end of 2022, 24 fish stocks remain on the overfishing list and 48 fisheries are overfished.



Habitat degradation, climate change, and overexploitation such as bycatch are all making it harder for fish to survive and reproduce. More adaptive fishery management would mitigate threats and conserve habitats that underpin the health of the ocean for generations to come.

WHY WE NEED A STRONG MSA

Our fisheries and the communities they support are facing serious threats to their future viability.

While managers have made major strides under the MSA to rebuild the nation's fisheries over the past three decades, more must be done to meet the challenges of today.

Despite a period of successful rebuilding, the number of overfished stocks has steadily increased for years.

In some cases, catch levels have not been adjusted quickly enough based on new data, making way for steeper population declines, fishery closures, and a longer, tougher road to recovery. Not enough progress has been made to rebuild fisheries so they can support sustainable fishing and healthy ecosystems.

The current law fails to account for climate change.

Climate impacts are dramatically altering our fisheries, reducing fishermen's catches and causing fish to migrate away from historic fishing zones. This poses a large threat to fishermen and coastal communities that rely on abundant fish for food and economic stability.

Proven "core conservation" protections are under attack.

These include standards for science-based catch limits to prevent overfishing and plans to rebuild overfished populations, despite their well-documented success in sustaining many fisheries. These harmful rollbacks only stand to jeopardize coastal communities and our ocean.

Fish are moving to find more suitable environments.

Sound fishery management is essential to maintain and restore the environments that fish depend on. In addition to underpinning vibrant marine habitats, robust fish populations are essential to the long-term well-being of fishing communities and those that rely on tourism and recreation along the coast.

WHAT THE MSA DOES

- ✓ Ensures regional management plans follow 10 national standards.
- ✓ Requires using science-based annual catch limits and accountability measures to prevent overfishing.
- ✓ Requires overfished stocks to be rebuilt as quickly as possible.
- ✓ Requires management plans to specify criteria that can be used to manage the fishery like maximum sustainable yield, optimum yield, and definitions for overfishing and overfished.
- ✓ Requires that allocations of quota are fair and equitable among users while considering conservation.

WHAT THE MSA DOES NOT DO

- ✗ Does not specify which type of management should be used for a given fishery.
- ✗ Does not specify where science or data come from.
- ✗ Does not require all overfished stocks to be rebuilt within 10 years.
- ✗ Does not specify what to consider in optimum yield. If the fishery has specific local priorities those could be considered to determine optimum yield.
- ✗ Does not lock in quota allocations between states or sectors.