OCEAN TRUST SCIENCE & SUSTAINABILITY

Advancing Fisheries Science and Management for Sustainable Ocean Resources

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NOAA Assessment Confirms the Sustainability of US Fisheries & Offers A Model For Assessing the Sustainability of Fishery Management Systems

New Orleans, February 1. 2016 – Ocean Trust strongly endorsed the recent release of NOAA's peer-reviewed self-assessment that shows the standards of the United States fishery management system under the Magnuson-Stevens Act more than meet the criteria of the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization's ecolabelling guidelines. These same guidelines serve as a basis for many consumer seafood certification and ranking schemes.

"*The NOAA assessment offers a model for assessing the sustainability of fishery management systems,"* noted Thor Lassen, President of Ocean Trust and co-developer of the assessment methodology. "*The thoroughness of the assessment by NOAA validates not only the sustainability of US fisheries, but the potential to move towards certification of management systems instead of individual fisheries."*

The assessment evaluated the US management system using the "*FAO Evaluation Framework to Assess the Conformity of Public and Private Ecolabelling Schemes with the FAO Guidelines for the Ecolabelling of Fish and Fishery Products from Marine Capture Fisheries*," but focused on the conformance of management systems as a whole rather than that of individual fisheries.

The initiative to assess fish management systems was based on discussions and finding from a series of "Science & Sustainability Forums" (2010-2014) convened by Ocean Trust and the American Institute of Fishery Research Biologists which concluded that:

- Sustainability is best defined by the management system, not a snapshot of the stock status (overfished) or fishing level (overfishing) at any point in time, but the capacity of the system to respond to changes in stock levels or impacts via management measures.
- Effective management systems will include adequate responsive action to end overfishing, avoid irreversible harm, and produce sustainable fisheries, and
- Sustainability, although often gauged on a fishery-by-fishery basis, is actually the result of a well-designed and implemented management system.

NOAA Fisheries staff participated in the Science and Sustainability Forum in Reston, Virginia in February 2012. Following the forum, NOAA Fisheries initiated a project to evaluate the U.S. federal fishery management system against the U.N. Food & Agriculture Organization's (FAO) *Guidelines for the Ecolabelling of Fish & Fishery Products from Marine Capture Fisheries.*

2012 Knauss Fellow Dr. Michelle Walsh led the NOAA Fisheries effort and collaborated closely with Thor Lassen of Ocean Trust.

The assessment examined three forms of evidence for management program conformance with twenty-four key criteria that addressed the management structure, status of stocks and ecosystem impacts as dictated by "*FAO Guidelines."* The structure and methodology of the framework approach was developed in collaboration with Ocean Trust and guidance from former FAO Directors to ensure conformance with "*FAO's guidelines.*"

The evaluation process was presented at the American Fisheries Society, Managing Our Nations Fisheries Conference, Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee Meeting, and at the 2014 FAO Committee on Fisheries Meeting in Rome. The process was also peer-reviewed by the Center for Independent Experts (CIE) and published as a NOAA Technical Memorandum on January 28, 2016. www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/publications/feature_stories/2016/fisheries_assessment.html

During this same time period Ocean Trust worked with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and later the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission to assess management systems in the Gulf of Mexico. The results of both assessments demonstrate that:

1. Management systems can be assessed to FAO standards providing major efficiencies in assuring the sustainability of products from those systems. When serious issues arise or as warranted, fishery-by fishery assessments can be conducted as needed.

2. The assessment process can address both national and state programs. For the Gulf, the assessment confirmed the use of adaptive management practices with modern and well-accepted management techniques to sustain its key fisheries over multiple generations.

3. If the processes within a management system are deemed to be adequate to sustain individual fisheries, then the products from those fisheries should be deemed sustainable (i.e., recognized in the market-place) as is often stated by NOAA regarding US fisheries.

"*We need to be realistic when looking at fisheries in the US and abroad, the vast majority of which have not been certified because of the impractically and cost under the current certification programs*," concluded Lassen. "*We have to rationalize the process and be open to efficiencies offered by a broader approach that focuses on evaluating management systems*."

Ocean Trust will moderate a panel on "*Rationalizing Seafood Sustainability"* during the 2016 North American Seafood Expo Conference Session Tuesday, March 8th 10:30-12:00 where representatives from Ocean Trust, NOAA, American Institute of Fishery Biologists and others will present their findings and conclusions regarding the sustainable management of seafood.

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Ocean Trust is an award-winning ocean conservation foundation building science, conservation and industry partnerships for the sustainability of the oceans. Its focus is fisheries sustainability, wildlife protection and environmental restoration in partnership with coastal communities dependent on the sea. Ocean Trust serves as secretariat for the Science & Sustainability Forum. For more information visit www.oceantrust.org.

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