



NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE



Catch shares help fishermen achieve sustainable fisheries because the value of their share is directly tied to the overall health of the fish stock and its habitat.

We can have our fish and eat them too! Catch shares provide a proven approach to sustainable fisheries management

Sustainable U.S. fisheries support fishermen, fishing communities, and the fishing industry at large. They also support everyone who loves seafood. Our nation's fisheries are managed so we'll have fish for years to come. This means we protect fish stocks from being depleted and we safeguard the ecosystems in which they live. It also means we protect the economies and communities that depend on healthy fisheries. The latest scientific information and strong partnerships with commercial and recreational fishermen are the cornerstones to sound management and sustainable fisheries.

Catch Shares: A Proven Approach

Catch shares are a powerful tool for managing our fisheries. Catch shares are designed to eliminate the race for fish and prevent overfishing. In combination with annual catch limits, this management strategy has proven effective for producing more fish at lower costs, and improve fishermen's safety and profit margin. Managers establish Annual Catch Limits based on the health of each fish stock. Under a catch share program, individual fishermen or groups of fishermen are then allocated a share of this catch limit. These fishermen can decide how and when to catch their share--preferably when weather, markets, and business conditions are most favorable.

Historically, a single catch limit was established for a fishery and all fishermen competed for a single quota. This created a "race to fish" situation where fishermen competed against one another to catch as many fish before the limit was reached and the fishery closed. This management method led to excessive equipment on the fishing grounds, unsafe fishing practices, market instability, and market instability, high levels of marine bycatch, and unsustainable fishing.

Reducing Bycatch

Fishermen target specific fish stocks, but in the quest to catch these fish they sometimes catch other species. This is called "bycatch." Traditional fishing practices often lead to high levels of bycatch but with catch shares, bycatch is deducted from the fisherman's quota. This creates an incentive to limit bycatch. No longer under pressure to race for their share of fish, catch shares allow fishermen to fish more selectively and minimize the number of marine species that are incidentally caught in a fishery--an important tool for managing sustainable fisheries.



Fishery Observer Program

An important component of the Catch Shares Program is the scientist-observers who work alongside fishermen to collect data. On fishing boats or on the docks, observers note how many fish were caught and where. They also collect data on the age and sex of the fish. Scientists study the abundance of fish, their age and growth, diet, reproduction and special habitat requirements. Managers and fishermen use this information to decide how many fish can be caught sustainably.

Increasing Economic Value

The value of the fisherman's share is directly proportional to the overall health of the fish stock. Therefore, fishermen are incentivized to support conservation of the resource to secure the value of his or her share in future years.

The West Coast Groundfish Catch Share Program

On the West Coast, the groundfish trawl fishery implemented a Catch Share Program in January 2011. Over 90 species are now managed under the catch share model, most of which live on or near the bottom of the ocean. Species like Lingcod, Pacific halibut, and whiting are just a few stocks managed under the new program.

The catch share program is expected to increase net economic benefit and create individual economic stability for trawl fishermen from Washington, Oregon, and California. Last year, the Pacific groundfish trawl fishery was worth approximately \$35 million to fishing communities from Bellingham, Washington to Morro Bay, California.

Other catch share programs in the Pacific Ocean include Pacific and North Pacific sablefish, North Pacific halibut, Bering Sea King and Tanner crabs, Bering Sea Pollock, North Pacific groundfish and Gulf of Alaska Rockfish.

Learn More About Catch Shares

NOAA Fisheries' National Website: www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/domes_fish/catchshare/index.htm

NOAA Fisheries' Northwest Region Website: www.nwr.noaa.gov/Groundfish-Halibut/Groundfish-Fishery-Management/Trawl-Program/index.cfm