



# Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

*Managing Fishery Resources in the U.S. Federal Waters of the Gulf of Mexico*

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July 8, 2015

Eileen Sobek  
Assistant Administrator for Fisheries  
National Marine Fisheries Service/NOAA  
U.S. Department of Commerce

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Subject: Bycatch Strategy

Dear Ms. Sobek:

As per your request of June 12, 2015, below are Gulf Council staff comments on the NMFS Bycatch Strategy.

At the June, 2015 Council Coordination Committee meeting, Mr. Sam Rauch presented the current status of NOAA's Bycatch Strategy. The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Gulf Council) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the early stages of development for this strategy. The Gulf Council has been proactive in establishing bycatch reduction devices in fisheries where there is bycatch, as evidenced by the historical accounts of amendments to the Gulf Council's fishery management plans in the U.S. National Bycatch Report. Priorities in the Gulf of Mexico would be to continue to develop new technologies to reduce bycatch while minimizing loss of catch and economic burden for Gulf of Mexico fisheries. It is imperative that as new improvements for bycatch reduction become available they do not unnecessarily burden fishermen and communities.

We encourage the NMFS bycatch program to expand cross training of all observers and to continue funding projects and programs that improve bycatch reductions. Currently, observers may only be trained to identify particular finfish bycatch; it would be helpful if observers were able to identify other taxa, such as corals and invasive species. Additionally, consistent bycatch reporting methods transparent to the public and resource managers is needed. We also suggest more outreach activities with stakeholders to further improve bycatch information and reduction and encourage NMFS to involve user groups early in the process of any regulatory, gear, or policy changes.

The Gulf Council looks forward to reviewing the Full Bycatch Strategy draft and working collaboratively with NMFS on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Doug Gregory  
Executive Director

cc: Gulf Council  
Council Staff  
Sam Rauch

## Doug Gregory

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**From:** Eileen Sobeck - NOAA Federal <eileen.sobeck@noaa.gov>  
**Sent:** Friday, June 12, 2015 10:14 AM  
**To:** \_NMFS FMC Exec Directors  
**Subject:** Engagement on NOAA Fisheries Bycatch Strategy

Good Morning:

We are taking a fresh look at our approaches to reducing bycatch and release mortality with a view toward revising the NOAA Fisheries Bycatch Strategy. As one of our important partners in solving bycatch challenges, [we're interested in your input](#).

As you know, [bycatch](#) is a complex issue that involves many topics including monitoring, research, implementation and management, enforcement, and evaluating program effectiveness. We also strive to communicate to ensure our efforts are well understood and to foster effective partnerships. We are interested in hearing your opinions and ideas on effective solutions to managing bycatch within these areas.

We are looking forward to discussing this with you at the upcoming Council Coordination Committee meeting in Florida. In the meantime, [we'd like to request your feedback on the following questions about our bycatch work](#):

- What do we do well?
- What can we do better? How can we improve our effectiveness?
- Are there specific science and management approaches we should emphasize?
- How should we prioritize our activities?
- What kind of incentives would help fishermen to minimize bycatch?
- H

How can we use partnerships to be more effective?

Please provide your input by **July 10** to [nmfs.bycatch@noaa.gov](mailto:nmfs.bycatch@noaa.gov). We will provide additional information and opportunities for input throughout this process.

We'd also like to invite you to visit our new [Bycatch webpage](#). We expect this page to serve as national hub for bycatch-related information and for highlighting our bycatch work throughout the year.

Thanks for your engagement on this important issue.  
Eileen Sobeck

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Eileen Sobeck  
Assistant Administrator for Fisheries  
National Marine Fisheries Service/NOAA  
U.S. Department of Commerce  
301-427-8000



**NOAA  
FISHERIES**

# Bycatch Strategy

Council Coordination Committee meeting

June 23, 2015

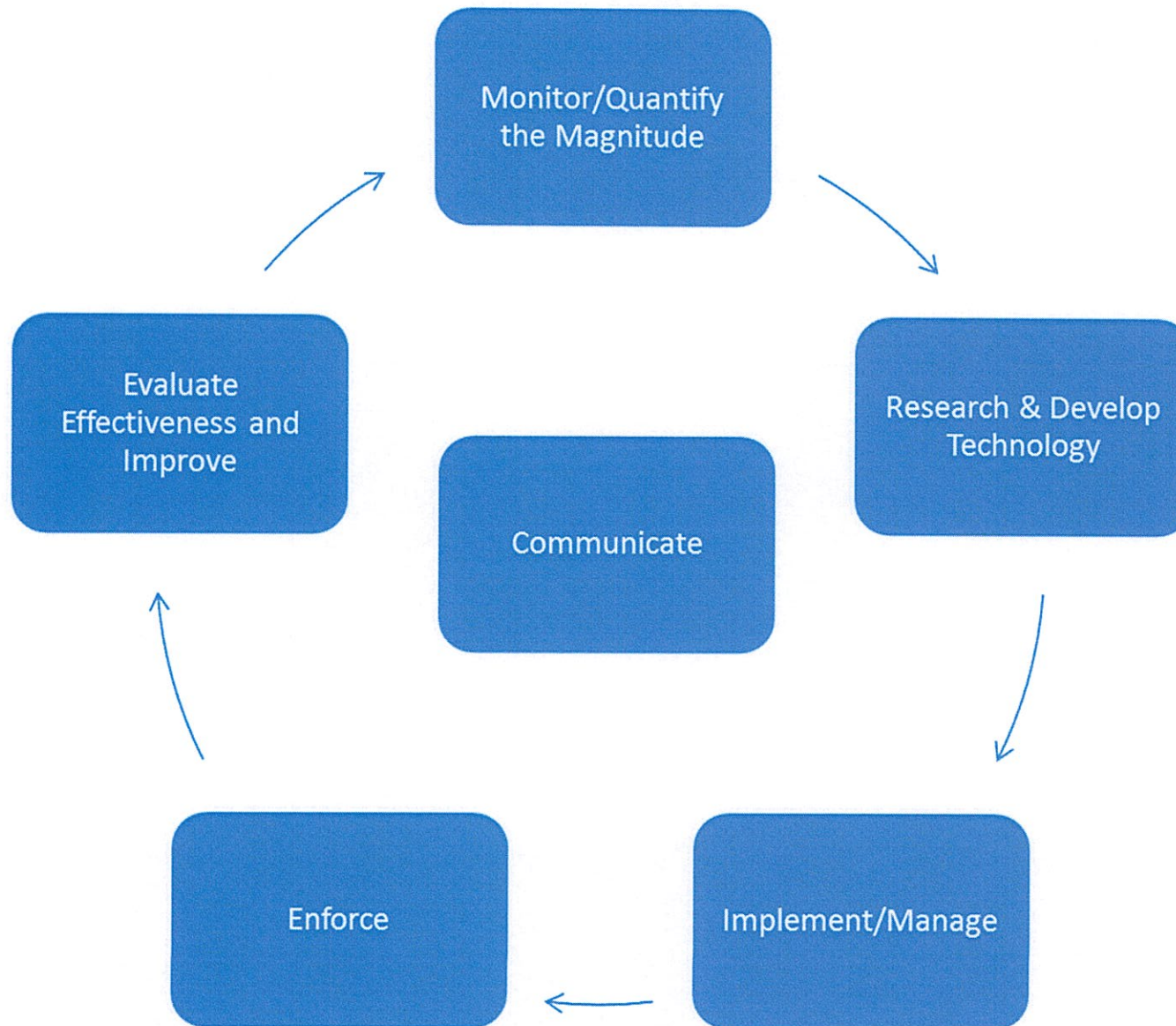


# Reducing Bycatch

- Minimizing and reducing domestic and international fisheries bycatch is a legislative mandate under a number of statutes, and is an essential component of sustainable fisheries and ecosystems.
- Over the last decade, together we have accomplished a lot to reduce and minimize bycatch in U.S. fisheries.



# Bycatch reduction involves:



# Revising Our Strategy

- NOAA Fisheries is beginning a review of our national bycatch priorities and strategies regionally, nationally, and internationally with the intent of developing a new **National Bycatch Strategy**.
- Our objectives include:
  - Improve coordination and effectiveness of addressing bycatch
  - Clarify regional, national and international priorities

# We'd like to hear from you...

- What do we do well?
- What can we do better? How can we improve our effectiveness?
- Are there specific science and management approaches we should emphasize?
- How should we prioritize our activities?
- How can we incentivize fishermen to minimize bycatch?
- How can we use partnerships to be more effective?
  
- These questions and more information can be found on our website:  
[http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/by\\_catch/comments.html](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/by_catch/comments.html)
  
- Please send your responses to [nmfs.bycatch@noaa.gov](mailto:nmfs.bycatch@noaa.gov) by July 10, 2015

# Bycatch Explained Webpage

The screenshot shows the NOAA Fisheries website with the article 'Bycatch Explained'. The page includes a navigation menu on the left with categories like 'About Us', 'Programs', 'Regions', 'Science Centers', 'Partners', 'News & Multimedia', 'Fisheries Resources', 'Congress', 'Educators and Students', 'Get Involved', and 'Forms'. The main content area is titled 'Bycatch Explained' and contains three sections:

- What is Bycatch?**: A photograph of a fishing net full of various fish. Text: "Fishermen sometimes catch and discard animals they do not want, cannot sell, or are not allowed to keep. This is collectively known as bycatch. Bycatch can be a bigger problem for some fisheries than others. In 2005, NOAA Fisheries estimated that about 17 percent of catch was bycatch in those U.S. commercial fisheries for which we have relevant data. Since then, there have been numerous efforts to reduce bycatch."
- Why is Bycatch a Problem?**: A photograph of a shark in a net. Text: "Unwanted catch is an issue both ecologically and economically. Animals that are discarded often die and cannot reproduce, impacting vulnerable ecosystems. Bycatch can also slow the rebuilding of overfished stocks and place protected species at further risk. Meanwhile, bycatch of one species may limit opportunities to fish for other species. This creates uncertainty and economic costs for fishermen."
- What is NOAA Fisheries' role?**: A photograph of a dolphin. Text: "Our goal at NOAA Fisheries is to ensure fisheries remain sustainable and protected species are given their best chance to recover. We work with our partners and fishermen to avoid bycatch and when they can't, we work with them to safely release their unintended catch. We have a number of resources and authorities to track bycatch, encourage innovation, and reduce bycatch."

At the bottom left, there is a 'FOLLOW US' section with social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Pinterest, and a 'Sign up for FishNews' form.

- Summary of the issues
- Efforts to:
  - Track bycatch
  - Encourage innovation
  - Reduce bycatch
- Success stories

[http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/stories/2015/05/05\\_07\\_15whatisbycatch.html](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/stories/2015/05/05_07_15whatisbycatch.html)



# Communications Coordination

- The Councils are one of our closest partners and there are benefits to coordinating our communication efforts.
- What is the best way to approach this communication?
  - Coordinate with Council staff
  - Share success stories
  - Other ideas?
- Success stories and other ideas can be sent to: [nmfs.bycatch@noaa.gov](mailto:nmfs.bycatch@noaa.gov)

A photograph of a whale's tail fluke splashing in blue water. The tail is the central focus, with water droplets and spray around it. The word "Questions?" is overlaid in a blue, bold font.

**Questions?**