

## PEW OCEANS COMMISSION REPORT ALLEGATIONS AND ANSWERS

On June 4, 2003, the Pew Oceans Commission released its three-year report, "America's Oceans: Charting a Course for Sea Change." In the report, the Commission made a number of statements and recommendations with which the National Fisheries Institute, the nation's largest non-profit seafood trade association, disagrees. Each of the report's major statements are addressed, below.

### *The Pew Report Says: US fisheries are collapsing.*

**Fact:** US fisheries are healthy and growing as demonstrated by reliable research data from a number of respected government and private sector organizations including the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the United Nations Food & Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the International Commission for Conservation of Atlantic Tuna (ICCAT), and US fishery management experts.

### *The Pew Report Says: US fisheries need massive overhaul and reform.*

**Fact:** The system in place for the conservation and management of our fisheries, while not perfect, is working remarkably well.

Fish is an important component of America's, and the world's, food supply. Based on a recent White House Office of Management & Budget recommendation, Americans will likely be encouraged to consume more seafood as a component of good health. Over half the world's population depends upon seafood for a significant portion of its protein needs, according to the UN's Food & Agriculture Organization. Pew's approach to fisheries rebuilding and management relies upon unrealistic baselines and ignores the social and economic considerations of a food-production system.

### *The Pew Report Says: Proven, workable solutions to fisheries management are the exception rather than the rule.*

**Fact:** The fishing industry regularly works with governments from around the globe to ensure fish stocks are sustainable. There are numerous examples of robust fisheries conservation and utilization in the US that, far from needing massive overhaul and reform, require only minor adjustments to ensure that sustainable use remains the guiding principle for US fisheries policy

The seafood industry's successes, domestically and globally, are many:

- Of the 16% of stocks that are overfished, 80% are recovering under rebuilding plans from the National Marine Fisheries Service; the remaining stocks are protected under other federal programs
- North Atlantic swordfish stocks restored to 95% of optimum levels in nearly half the time anticipated
- Endangered sea turtle numbers are climbing, thanks to conservation and industry-supported nest protection programs
- New England groundfish complex has increased by over 150 percent in the past five years, with substantial gains in Georges Bank haddock, yellowtail flounder, silver hake and witch flounder

- The New England scallop fishery is now rebuilt.
- In California, sardines, which were decimated as a result of El Niño-like weather conditions, have returned to the Monterey Bay and are being sustainably managed coast-wide.
- In Alaska, where fisheries account for half of all seafood landed annually in the U.S., crab, salmon, halibut and groundfish fisheries are being harvested at sustainable levels.

***The Pew Report Says: We need a new course for worldwide fisheries management.***

**Fact:** Most of the world's ocean fisheries are already under management by one or more multi-nation fishing organizations.

The UN Food & Agriculture Organization (FAO) says that global capture fisheries production is relatively stable\* with nearly three-quarters of fish stocks managed in a sustainable manner. This means that fisheries that are doing what they should do -- producing catches that feed our current population and save resources for the future.

In fact, many of the recommendations of the Pew Commission, such as a reduction in the number of fishing vessels and the use of no-fishing or "no take" zones, are already being effectively implemented where needed.

Japan reduced its fleet of large-scale tuna longline vessels by 20% in 1999, a reduction of 132 vessels in one year. Over 30 former illegal, unregulated and unreported tuna fishing vessels throughout the world have been scrapped through the initiatives of concerned fishing nations

***The Pew Report Says: Overfishing has decimated large ocean swimming fish. 30% of the fish populations along the Atlantic and Pacific Coasts are overfished or are being fished unsustainably and "an increasing number" are being driven to extinction.***

**Fact:** The Pew Commission's findings are not supported by the facts. Government scientists at the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) report consistent progress in maintaining healthy fish stocks and rebuilding those that are "overfished."

In its Status of US Fisheries Report to Congress for 2002, the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) said that *overfishing* is occurring in less than 10% of US fisheries and the industry and government working together is bringing that to an end with strict management plans.

Overfished – means a fishery that has experienced overharvesting in past. US law requires such fisheries to be strictly managed to rebuild the fish stock, often with considerable social and economic costs in the short-term.

Overfishing – refers to current problems. US law requires fishery managers to prevent overfishing in US fisheries. When it occurs by accident, corrective measures must be taken.

***The Pew Report Says: US should establish an independent national oceans agency.***

An independent national oceans agency would add an unnecessary financial and bureaucratic burden to the management of our oceans. The latest report by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration indicates that current fisheries management is not only working, but steadily improving as better science and management methods become available.

A federal oceans agency already exists. The National Marine Fisheries Service, under the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, is charged with fishery management. NOAA works with other agencies on all factors that affect our oceans, including pollution and weather. NOAA is, correctly, an agency within the Department of Commerce, recognizing that important businesses such as shipping and commercial seafood harvesting (fishing) are vital to our national economy.

***The Pew Report Says: US should establish a permanent federal interagency oceans council.***

**Fact:** This recommendation of the Pew Commission is a transparent rationalization for policy recommendations to move fisheries management and science decisions out of the region and back to Washington, DC. A federal oceans council would create several new layers of bureaucracy and would eat up any new funding that Congress might provide for fisheries research.

***The Pew Report Says: US should establish regional ocean ecosystem councils to enforce principles of ecosystem health and integrity, sustainability and precaution.***

**Fact:** Regional Fishery Management Councils are increasingly incorporating ecosystem-based management principles, so ecosystem councils are redundant and unnecessary. That is, they must look at predator-prey relationships and the impact on other plants and animals so that adverse impact on the marine environment and marine life is minimized.

The existing Regional Fishery Management Councils are comprised of representatives of the commercial fishing, recreational fishing, and conservation communities. They are nominated by Governors, appointed by the Secretary of Commerce and represent a decision-making process that is open, transparent, and includes broad stakeholder participation, yet the Commission attacks this process of empowerment for local communities and affected stakeholders as inadequate.

***The Pew Report Says: The principal laws to protect our coastal zones, endangered marine mammals, ocean waters and fisheries were enacted 30 years ago on a crisis-by-crisis, sector-by-sector basis. US ocean governance is in disarray. There is a hodgepodge of ocean laws and programs that do not provide unified, clearly stated goals and measurable objectives.***

**Fact:** A unified oceans policy is already in place. The Magnuson-Stevens Act of 1976 requires that all ocean resources be used in a sustainable manner. In 1996, Congress strengthened the Magnuson-Stevens Act with significant amendments. The Federal government, through several agencies, ensures that Magnuson-Stevens is enforced. All Regional Fishery Management Councils must comply with Magnuson-Stevens in developing fishery management plans.

***The Pew Report Says: The US should establish a national system of fully protected marine reserves.***

**Fact:** Fisheries managers have used marine reserves for more than 30 years. Called "no take" zones, marine reserves or marine protected areas can be a useful tool in protecting vulnerable areas of the ocean. However, establishment of such reserves should be science-based, rather than randomly designating a certain percentage of the seas as off-limits.

***The Pew Report Says: Incidental harvest of non-target species by incidental capture in fishing gear is depleting the sea turtle, marine mammals, sea birds and non-commercial fish populations.***

***Fact:*** Fishery managers have made great strides in employing state-of-the-art ecosystem-based management by protecting sensitive fish habitat and developing technologies to help fishermen avoid the incidental harvest of non-target species. For example, compliance with requirements for turtle excluder devices, which allow sea turtles to swim free of shrimp trawl nets, is 98% in the Gulf of Mexico shrimp fishery. Combined with industry-supported protection programs on the nesting beaches of Mexico, these activities have helped the population of endangered Kemp's Ridley turtles increase dramatically.

***The Pew Report Says: The executive branch or Congress should place a moratorium on the expansion of marine finfish farms until standards for ecologically sustainable practices are set and implemented.***

***Fact:*** Much of the criticism of marine aquaculture, particularly salmon farms, is unwarranted. Marine aquaculture facilities must obtain site and operation permits from the Environmental Protection Agency, US Department of Agriculture and National Marine Fisheries Service and comply with all water quality and environmental requirements. Advances in farming methods and feed formulations have resulted in better feed-conversion ratios (i.e., less wild-caught fish used per pound of farmed fish), less waste and reduced use of therapeutic antibiotics.

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