

Oceans

Sharing the catch: An innovative approach to revive fisheries

Captain Steve Arnold scans the horizon from the wheelhouse of the 55-foot trawler *Elizabeth Helen*. “It’s a great feeling to be able to fish sustainably—and profitably,” he says. Arnold and his crew have just hauled in 400 pounds of fluke, or summer flounder, east of Point Judith, RI.

The *Elizabeth Helen* is one of eight boats participating in a pilot catch-share program that EDF supported for fluke, whose numbers have been declining. In exchange for accepting a strict limit on their catch, the fishermen are given flexibility to fish when they want.

In a major breakthrough during Summer 2009, the New England Fishery Management Council voted 16–0 to implement a similar program for groundfish, including cod and haddock. “For the first time, fishermen will be held truly accountable for the number of groundfish they catch,” says our New England fisheries policy director Sally McGee, who is the only representative from an environmental group on the council.

Fishery managers typically have tried to limit the catch by shortening the season. That approach gives fishermen no incentive to conserve and compels them to race each other to catch as many fish as they can, even in the most dangerous weather.

But with catch shares, fishermen like Arnold are no longer racing against the clock, so they can fish when it’s safe and when market prices are higher. And they can be more selective, taking precautions to avoid bycatch, unwanted

fish that are typically discarded. If a fisherman catches more than his share—or the wrong kind of fish—he can buy shares from another boat, keeping the total catch within the limit. The result: less waste and more profit.

EDF has forged alliances with fishermen who support catch shares as a cure for ailing fisheries nationwide. A program we helped develop for red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico has cut bycatch by 70%—and was recently expanded. A 2008 study in *Science* found that catch shares prevent, and even reverse, the collapse of fisheries.

“This is the future,” says Arnold. “Over time, I’m confident fish will come back. If you take care of the ocean, it will take care of you.”

▶ **VIDEO:** See fishermen talk about saving the seas at edf.org/catchshareaction

Replenishing the seas



All around North America, EDF is working to revive troubled fisheries by giving fishermen an incentive to conserve.



“Environmental Defense Fund is the first group to recognize the human dimension to the crisis in the oceans.”

RICH YOUNG
HARBORMASTER, CRESCENT CITY, CA



“By protecting critical habitats and offering fishermen a financial stake in the health of fisheries, we can revive coastal communities and bring the resilient oceans back to life.”

DAVID FESTA
VP FOR WEST COAST AND OCEANS

The U.S.-Cuba good neighbor policy

While politically distant, the U.S. and Cuba are ecologically linked, and must collaborate to protect their marine life. So under a special license from the U.S. government, EDF joined with Cuban scientists and managers and initiated a number of projects this year ranging from sustainable coastal development to rebuilding devastated shark populations.



Protecting threatened coral reefs

Off Cape Lookout, NC, at depths of 1,000 feet, ancient coral forests rise like giant Sequoias. Stretching from North Carolina to Florida, this undersea world was until recently unexplored. “It may be the world’s largest deep-coral ecosystem,” says our chief oceans scientist Dr. Doug Rader.

This year the reef was declared a protected area, culminating a decade of work by EDF. The designation bans activities like bottom trawling that can decimate slow-growing corals. The new 25,000-square-mile refuge also shelters hundreds of important fish species.

This victory complements another, half a world away, where we helped secure national monument status for pristine shallow-water coral reefs in the Central Pacific Islands, covering an area nearly the size of California. EDF had proposed the designation to the Bush administration and built key political and scientific support.



LEVERAGING AN OPPORTUNITY

Taking catch shares international

Overfishing is a global problem, and catch shares can be part of an international solution. EDF is particularly focused on countries whose waters sustain U.S. fisheries.

Leverage point: With Mexico’s fisheries in crisis, we teamed up with the Mexican government and fishermen this year to implement a catch-share program for shrimp in the Gulf of California. The Gulf is an ecological treasure that supplies more than half of Mexico’s commercial fish.

Allies: Mexican government, local Mexican nonprofits and World Wildlife Fund

A donor’s perspective:

“We’re completely sold on EDF’s bold vision for using catch shares to bring oceans back to health while making sure that fishermen can still earn a good living.”

SAM WALTON
EDF TRUSTEE
BOARD DIRECTOR, WALTON FAMILY FOUNDATION

70% of fisheries worldwide have crashed or are overexploited