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National Fisheries Conference
Managing our Nation's Marine Fisheries – Past, Present, and Future
13 November [2003](#)

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I am honored to be here with you this evening celebrating the landmark Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act. I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you about the Coast Guard's contribution to the protection of America's valuable fisheries resources and our role in domestic and international fisheries enforcement.

[Recognize VIPs]

But before I do that, I must first recognize NOAA Fisheries and the eight Regional Fishery Management Councils for the outstanding work they have done improving the size and sustainability of U.S. fish stocks. The number of stocks with sustainable harvest rates rose by 45 percent between 1999 and 2001. Many fish species – like Georges Bank haddock and yellowtail flounder – that were heavily over-harvested a few years ago, today are either healthy or headed toward recovery through their efforts. In the South Atlantic, the King and Spanish mackerel stocks have been successfully rebuilt, as have the scallop stocks off New England. In the Pacific, NOAA Fisheries recently reported Pacific Halibut by-catch has been reduced by more than 30 percent and Pollock biomass is near all-time high levels as a result of management efforts. These are remarkable success stories.

As the global demand for fish increases, so does our responsibility to ensure the sustainability of our finite fishery resources. The seas and the resources they possess are the world's "Village Commons" of the 21st Century. There are significant threats to their sustainability, including under-reporting catch, using illegal harvesting methods, and unlawful encroachment into Exclusive Economic Zones, or EEZs.

Working together closely with fisheries managers both at home and internationally, the Coast Guard for many years has been tasked with the enforcement of

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laws and regulations that prohibit these illegal fishing practices. We take this responsibility seriously. Our fisheries law enforcement budget is more than 600 million dollars, or 11% of our operating budget, which is on a par with our spending for Search and Rescue and drug enforcement. We also are updating and revalidating our fisheries law enforcement strategic plan to ensure close alignment with the fishing industry stakeholders, other government agencies at the federal, state, and local levels, and our enforcement partners. As part of our revalidation process, we've held nine public listening sessions and received constructive feedback from some 200 constituents.

What have they told us? They have said that our fisheries enforcement priorities should remain unchanged:

1. Prevent foreign fisher incursions into the US EEZ;
2. Ensure compliance with domestic fisheries regulations; and
3. Enforce international fisheries management regimes.

To accomplish these priorities and ensure the success of the fisheries management plans, I believe there are four essential and interrelated cornerstones to provide effective enforcement:

1. Strong regulatory schemes;
2. Enforcement presence;
3. Investment in technology; and
4. Effective partnerships

I'll discuss each in order.

1. Strong Regulatory Schemes

Strong regulatory schemes begin at home. As we know, in 1976, the Magnuson-Stevens Act set the standard in domestic legislation to manage fisheries. It has grown and matured since that time and remains the benchmark U.S. legislation for managing living marine resources. From the Coast Guard's perspective, the eight Regional Fishery Management Councils have worked diligently to improve U.S. fish stocks and safeguard those fish stocks' long-term sustainability. Although much work remains, selected

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stocks, once-decimated, have rebounded and fishing grounds once thought barren have been replenished.

But every positive step forward brings its own challenges. With improvements in our domestic fisheries, the incentive for irresponsible fishing by a few bad actors increases. The situation worldwide is considerably worse. As the rest of the world's fisheries decline, the rich U.S. EEZ becomes a more enticing target for foreign fishers. To combat this increased threat to our fisheries, we need regulatory regimes that are enforceable and have teeth. If the regime lacks significant penalty, there will be little or no incentive to comply. Fines and/or other penalties will simply be written off as the cost of doing business. We have seen this, especially in cases involving large foreign fishing vessels.

The Coast Guard is working closely with the domestic Fishery Management Councils and international regional fishery management organizations.

- This cooperation is a component of our fisheries law enforcement strategic plan, OCEAN GUARDIAN.
- We also played a key role in drafting the US National Plan of Action (NPOA) to combat illegal, unregulated, and unreported (IUU) fishing. This NPOA draft was presented at the January 2003 U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization Committee on Fisheries meeting as a model for other countries to use in developing their own NPOAs.
- Finally, the Coast Guard is developing a comprehensive implementation plan for the UN Fish Stocks Agreement (FSA). The UNFSA contains some of the most innovative and far-reaching enforcement provisions of any management Agreement to date. Both the NPOA and the UNFSA have enforcement implications for the Coast Guard. We look for more of these types of initiatives in the future which will strengthen our enforcement foothold in the international arena. The challenge for all of us, and key to success for FSA, is to convince the major fishing nations of the world to become active players in its enforcement.

[2. Enforcement Presence](#)

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In order to enforce strong regulatory schemes, we must have an enforcement presence. Presence can come in the form of enforcement ships and planes and/or unmanned aerial vehicles, vessel monitoring systems, and cued intelligence. However, in the final analysis, the deterrence value of having a Coast Guard cutter or aircraft present and visible is significant.

To deliver effective presence in today's resource-constrained environment, we are trying to work smarter, not harder. As you are all aware, the Coast Guard is a multi-mission service and our mission portfolio has undergone a tremendous shift since September 11, 2001. Since 9/11, we have reduced fisheries patrols CG-wide approximately 33%. To compensate, we are relying more than ever on the last two cornerstones – technology and partnerships – to maintain our enforcement presence on the fishing grounds. And I'm happy to report, it's working. Of nearly 15,000 at-sea commercial fishing vessel boardings conducted over the last three years, less than 3% of them had "significant violations", meaning a violation that gives the fisher a significant monetary advantage, has a significant impact on the fish stock, or is a violation that is of a particularly sensitive nature. Our focus on significant fisheries violations was a major change implemented over the last decade in response to your feedback, that we were out on the fishing grounds, writing a great number of tickets, but not effectively catching the "bad guys".

Our Deepwater modernization program, which is our plan to replace our aging offshore cutters and aircraft, will answer many of the enforcement hardware presence concerns of the Coast Guard's fisheries enforcement program for the future. Additionally, OCEAN GUARDIAN calls for a strengthening of our partnerships with other agencies and a leveraging of our combined resources. Presence also means effective presence; to do this we worked with NOAA and Department of State to implement a more aggressive enforcement policy that will allow the Coast Guard to use gunfire to stop Russian fishing vessels that illegally fish in our EEZ in the Bering Sea. The ability and threat to use that level of force has reduced illegal encroachments of our EEZ along the Maritime Boundary Line to near zero this year. We also plan to bolster our boarding officer training, provide more instructor billets at each of our five Regional

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Fisheries Training Centers, and add intelligence-analyst billets in high-threat fisheries enforcement regions.

3. Investment in Technology

As I noted earlier, there is significant deterrent value in having a Coast Guard cutter or aircraft present and visible . . . but with 3.4 million miles of EEZ to patrol, plus certain high threat areas on the high seas, we cannot be everywhere at once. One answer to this is the effective leveraging of existing technology and investment in future technologies, especially surveillance and tracking technologies. Senator Stevens . . . I've got the message.

The Management Councils continue to implement compulsory carriage of Vessel Monitoring Systems, or VMS, in their fishery management plans. This significantly improves the Coast Guard's ability to efficiently manage our resources. Through the use of VMS data we can effectively monitor the comings and goings of fishing vessels in dozens of protected areas from one site and then respond to confirmed incursions. This certainly is a much better use of our resources than having a cutter out patrolling in one area while an incursion is happening in a completely different location.

We are working with NOAA Fisheries to leverage the technology available in their National VMS. We estimate we will have access to their system this summer, providing all of our Command Centers with continuous live feed data. We anticipate that same live-feed data to be exported to our major cutters by the end of 2004. This will significantly enhance our cutters' ability to respond to domestic, closed-area incursions.

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VMS is key to the future of fisheries enforcement and it is paying dividends already. There have been a number of enforcement cases decided solely on VMS data, proving the validity of the system, its usefulness as an enforcement tool, and a way to increase presence through technology.

Again, our Deepwater program is another technology development that will measurably improve our ability to ensure compliance with fisheries regulations. We

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anticipate cutting steel on our first National Security Cutter in 2004 with delivery in 2006. This class of cutter will have the range and endurance to effectively enforce both domestic and international fisheries regulations hundreds of miles out to sea. Also planned as a part of the Integrated Deepwater System are unmanned aerial vehicles or UAVs. UAVs can be launched from either a land-based or sea-based site and provide persistent aerial surveillance. For fisheries cases, the UAV can either alert a nearby cutter of suspected illegal operations or simply document suspected illegal activity to be used later in a prosecution, similar to what is now done in some VMS cases.

Other technology advances we are pursuing include tracking devices for seized foreign fishing vessels ordered back to port and new non-lethal technologies to compel compliance of foreign vessels that encroach on the US EEZ.

4. Effective Partnerships

Yet another means of leveraging constrained resources is with effective partnerships. The Coast Guard enjoys many partnerships: domestic and international, formal and informal.

To bolster the enforcement presence in the U.S. EEZ, Coast Guard units routinely participate in joint operations with state and local enforcement partners. Many of these joint operations are carried out under the auspices of [NOAA's Joint Enforcement Agreements](#) and many are done ad hoc, based on close working relationships cultivated at the local unit level.

We assist NOAA Fisheries in enforcement operations as well. It is not uncommon for a NOAA Fisheries agent to be deployed on one of our cutters or to fly in one of our enforcement aircraft on fisheries patrol. In certain regions we assist NOAA Fisheries with inspections of shoreside facilities.

In the international realm we currently have fisheries enforcement agreements with Canada, the People's Republic of China, and Taiwan. We are in the process of concluding one with the Russian Federation and we are working on one with Mexico. We collaborated with Russia on a Joint Operations Manual, addressing law enforcement

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operations in the Bering Sea and regularly conduct successful joint operations with their vessels and aircraft.

This past summer, CGC JARVIS embarked a Peoples' Republic of China Bureau of Fisheries officer, on board JARVIS pursuant to a US/PRC Memorandum of Agreement. Based on intelligence received from our newly established Maritime Intelligence Fusion Center Pacific, JARVIS intercepted four PRC vessels engaged in large-scale pelagic high seas driftnet (HSDN) fishing, in violation of a 1991 UN Moratorium on HSDN fishing. Through our cooperative efforts with the PRC, these four vessels were identified as Chinese; one vessel was directed to port where they were met by PRC Bureau of Fisheries authorities who took direct enforcement action and the other three vessels were turned over by JARVIS to a PRC Bureau of Fisheries enforcement vessel that escorted them to port in China for enforcement action. These cases are some of our best examples of international cooperation in the fisheries arena.

The United States is also a member of many formal Regional Fishery Management Organizations. Through these organizations we partner with other nations to oversee stewardship of our marine resources. The Coast Guard plays a key role as a member of U.S. delegations and enforcement advisor to these organizations.

Partnerships are not just limited to policy-making or direct enforcement operations. Training plays a vital role in effective management and enforcement. The Coast Guard has five regional fisheries training centers. We routinely host students from local, state, and other federal agencies in our two-week fisheries courses. We have also hosted Russian, Irish, and Mexican students as well. Through our International Maritime Officers Courses, our deployable International Training Teams, and our specialized workshops, we routinely work with countries around the world to assist them in developing their own fisheries management, enforcement, and stewardship programs to help them better manage and enforce their own regulatory schemes.

Regimes, Presence, Technology, Partnerships – necessary ingredients to effective compliance. Before I conclude, allow me to make several comments on fisheries management from an enforcement and safety perspective.

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Although management of fisheries is going well, there is always room for improvement. I offer the following suggestions to improve the management of our nation's fisheries:

- As regulations become more complex, such as the recently passed Amendment 13 to the Northeast Multispecies Plan by the New England Fisheries Management Council, it is more important than ever to consider enforcement when crafting the regulations. These regulations need to be simpler and more understandable for both enforcement and the fishermen trying to comply with the regulations.
- Expand the use of Vessel Monitoring Systems in fisheries that have large or numerous closed or protected areas.
- End derby fisheries, such as the Gulf of Mexico Red Snapper and the Washington Oregon Halibut fishery, to make the fisheries safer for the fishermen.
- Seek every opportunity to increase involvement by fishermen in the science and management of fisheries; belief and confidence in the science and management by fishermen will breed voluntary compliance.

There is much at stake in getting fisheries regulations and compliance right. You in this room have the responsibility to ensure sustainable fisheries resources for our future generations . . . your work is both critical and at times frustrating as you attempt to address competing public interests. Count on the Coast Guard as an eager player in this national policy issue. We plan to work collaboratively with you to develop safe and enforceable management plans and then to enforce those plans through presence, technology, and partnerships -- now and well into the future.

Thank you very much.