Report Led By UNH Fisheries Expert Offers Novel Solution To Overfishing

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DURHAM, N.H. -- A report released Friday, October 12 by a group of marine science and fishery management experts proposes a straightforward approach for establishing performance measures to end overfishing in U.S. waters.

Put simply, by establishing a buffer below the level that scientists determine overfishing occurs, the inherent uncertainties in both the science and management effectiveness can be accounted for in setting catch limits.

The group was convened by the Lenfest Ocean Program based in Washington, D.C. and was led by marine scientist and fisheries expert Andrew Rosenberg of the University of New Hampshire.

"Our goal with this report is to create a practical way to end overfishing by developing a simple, consistent process for setting annual catch limits that reduces risk to the resource and is more predictable for fishermen," said Rosenberg, a professor at the Department of Natural Resources and the Institute for the Study of Earth, Oceans, and Space at UNH and lead author of the report.

"Fishery managers never have perfect data nor do management plans always work as intended. As a consequence, management decisions need to be more conservative to prevent damage to the resource and to the fishery," added Rosenberg who, as former Northeast regional administrator for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service, played a major role in developing and implementing recovery plans for New England fisheries which now are showing improvements on the George's Bank and other fishing grounds.

The Lenfest Ocean Program (www.lenfestocean.org) timed the report's release so that the National Marine Fisheries Service could use its recommendations to develop regulations to implement the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Reauthorization Act – the nation's primary ocean fisheries law, which was signed into law in January.

The reauthorized law introduced a new mandate to specify annual catch limits for all fisheries at a level that does not allow overfishing and enacted measures that hold fishery managers

accountable for adhering to these limits. The Lenfest Ocean Program also intends for the report to guide regional fishery management councils as they incorporate annual catch limits into their management planning.

"This working group did an excellent job of setting clear, precise guidelines for improving the way we managed fisheries. Although this report is aimed at U.S. fisheries management, the group has come up with a solution to overfishing that can be used around the world. I encourage fishery managers far and wide to start implementing these principles," said Margaret Bowman, director of the Lenfest Ocean Program.

One of the report's co-authors, Joseph Powers of the Department of Oceanography and Coastal Sciences at Louisiana State University and former fisheries stock assessment scientist for the National Marine Fisheries Service, noted that it was now up to the federal government to "decide whether this report will remain an academic exercise or will become our nation's action plan."