

The Fishery Conservation Transition Act Fact Sheet

S.3594, The Fishery Conservation Transition Act, was introduced by Sen. Bill Nelson (D-Fla.) on July 15, 2010. FCTA has five key areas which steer NOAA Fisheries back to the intent of the 2006 reauthorization of the Magnuson Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA): ending overfishing.

1. A Transition to Rational Management and Sustainable Fishing – Bill Section Two

FCTA addresses current MSA problems pertaining to fishing in a fishery that includes a stock that is undergoing overfishing. Gaps in MSA regarding multispecies complexes have led to overreaching moves such as the current proposal in the South Atlantic to close all bottom fishing for all snapper-grouper species in order to carry out rebuilding of one species -- red snapper. This section maintains the prohibition on fishing for an overfished stock. However, FCTA gives the Secretary of Commerce the ability to allow fishing for other stocks in the complex IF specific thresholds are met and IF certain conservation actions prescribed in the bill are being taken, such as:

- Measures to minimize bycatch and bycatch mortality;
- Actions to improve data collection and implementation of a targeted research and monitoring program for the challenged fish stock and the fishery as a whole;
- A program for on-board observers;
- Immediate steps to close stock assessment data gaps in that fishery complex including a stock assessment for the challenged stock, and
- A report from the regional fishery management council on a long-term discard mortality reduction program for the challenged stock.

2. Time to Transition – Bill Section Two

FCTA gives NOAA Fisheries and the regional councils time to transition to a new management framework that will deal more rationally and scientifically with rebuilding of stocks undergoing overfishing. Closures will still be an option but only after actions above have been taken. Under FCTA, if actions above have been taken and total fishing closures are still deemed necessary, they would not be considered before the end of fishery year 2015.

3. Economic Assistance – Bill Section Three

FCTA amends MSA's economic assistance program to better ensure funding is targeted to those directly affected by closures. The bill more specifically directs the Commerce Secretary to carry out an examination of who is being affected and how they are being affected when prioritizing economic assistance.

4. Better Information Gathering and Use – Bill Section Five

FCTA directs Commerce to carry out better social and economic data gathering and analysis pertaining to a given fishery closure decision and directs the department to look at alternative fishery management measures. Requirements in this area include analysis of social and economic impacts on fishing communities and industries related to the fishery in question; fishery management measures to enhance the sustainability of the challenged stock; an evaluation of alternative measures to enhance the sustainability of that stock and a stock assessment update for stocks undergoing overfishing every two years and a full assessment at least every five years.

5. National Academy of Science Study – Bill Section Five

FCTA directs the Secretary of Commerce to conduct a National Academy of Science study focused on questions surrounding multispecies complexes and the impediments to managing all stocks in such a fishery to maximum sustainable yield.

