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WITEK: ASMFC (from page 31)

A recent study has demonstrated that such FMPs, which take an incremental approach to harvest reductions in an attempt to minimize socio-economic impacts, create a culture of overfishing that helps assure the FMP's failure, while FMPs that decisively act to end overfishing and rebuild overfished stocks tend to spawn cultures of conservation that lead to healthy, sustainable fisheries.

Viewed in that light, the ASMFC's management failures are not only understandable, but predictable.

The federal fishery management system fell victim to the same sort of conflicts between conservation and socio-economic concerns, and engaged in the same sort of ineffective management, after Magnuson-Stevens first became law. That didn't change until Congress passed the Sustainable Fisheries Act of 1996 (SFA), which compelled federal fisheries managers to make conservation their top priority.

That experience suggests that the only way to transform the ASMFC into an effective fishery management body is to pass what would amount to a new SFA, which would require the ASMFC to adhere to the same legal mandates to end overfishing and rebuild overfished stocks that now apply only to federal fishery managers.

By doing so, Congress would make the ASMFC's mission clear, and allow it to focus its talent and energy on conserving and rebuilding Atlantic fish stock, and free it from the impossible task that it faces today, for the ASMFC cannot expect to effectively manage fish stocks so long as it tries to serve both the conservation needs of fish stocks and the socio-economic interests of various stakeholder groups.

The fish must come first, for it's impossible to have a fishing industry, or any socio-economic benefits, without them.

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