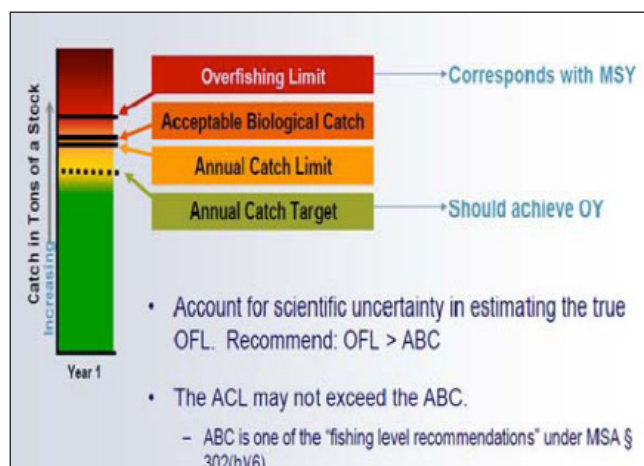




Annual Catch Limit

What is Annual Catch Limit?

An annual catch limit (ACL) is a fishery management strategy used by the Fishery Management Councils to ensure a species population remains stable, is able to replenish itself and prevent overfishing. An ACL is a yearly harvest limit of a fish species or group of fish species.



How do fishery managers calculate an ACL?

Fishery managers use several tools to calculate an ACL. These are: the maximum sustainable yield (MSY), optimum yield (OY), overfishing limit (OFL) and acceptable biological catch (ABC). All values are calculated based on annual landing reports and stock assessments.

When developing management strategies, scientists and managers will always aim to target a fisheries optimum yield (OY) - the amount of fish yield which will provide the greatest overall benefit with respect to food production, recreational opportunities and the protection of the marine ecosystems.

As a baseline to achieve OY scientists will estimate a fishery's maximum sustainable yield (MSY), the yearly average maximum catch a fishery can withstand at a sustainable rate over a long period of time. Similar to the MSY is the OFL or overfishing limit, it estimates the yearly maximum catch for a fishery within a shorter period of time. The OFLs are the boundary limits of a fishery before it is at risk of being overfished.

If landings are equal to OFLs then there is a 50-50 chance that the fishery is being overfished. If landings exceed the OFL then overfishing is occurring.

As a preventive measure to avoid overfishing the Magnuson-Stevens Reauthorization Act of 2007 requires scientists to recommend an allowable biological catch (ABC). The ABC is an annual catch level set below the OFL, taking into consideration scientific uncertainty, a fish stock's life history and reproductive potential and vulnerability to overfishing.

Once all these parameters have been established the Regional Fishery Management Councils are required to develop ACLs for each of its managed fisheries.

Data poor stocks and their impact on OFLs and ACLs

Although it is impossible to have perfect knowledge and control of a fishery, accurate landing reports and comprehensive stock assessments help in reducing scientific uncertainty and approximating true OFL values. The disadvantage of managing data poor stocks is the large uncertainty gap between estimated OFLs and true OFLs. When faced with managing data poor stocks scientists will rely on the best scientific information available. They calculate these parameters using conservative values and applying a precautionary management approach. This can impact the fishery by setting OFLs and ACLs at much lower values than necessary. On the other hand, if OFLs and ACLs are overestimated and set at levels higher than what the fisheries can handle overfishing will occur and the fish stocks may take several years to recover.

For more information on ACLs, Regional Fishery Management Councils and the Magnuson-Stevens Reauthorization Act you may call:
The Caribbean Fishery Management Council
(787) 766- 5926
Fish and Wildlife Bureau
Department of Natural and Environmental Resources, PR
(787)999-2200 ext. 2613
The Division of Fish and Wildlife
Department of Planning and Natural Resources, USVI
(340) 775-6762