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President Trump's April 2025 Executive Order on American Seafood Competitiveness: Considerations for U.S. Fisheries

Introduction

On April 17, 2025, President Trump issued Executive Order (E.O.) 14276, “Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness,” which required multiple federal agency actions related to U.S. fisheries science and management, the seafood trade, and commercial fishing in marine national monuments (MNM). President Trump directed the Secretary of Commerce (hereinafter the Secretary), whose authorities include administration of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), as amended, to address U.S. seafood trade practices, including the U.S. seafood supply chain and seafood imports, and the regulation of domestic and foreign fishing in U.S. waters. The Department of Commerce includes the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA’s) National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), which is the primary federal agency responsible for the regulation and management of U.S. fisheries and seafood. Congress, through its enactment of MSA and other living marine resource (LMR)-related statutes, has regularly shown interest in U.S. fisheries and seafood production, including their sustainable management and economic contributions.

Executive Order 14276

E.O. 14276 builds on elements of E.O. 13921, “Promoting American Seafood Competitiveness and Economic Growth,” issued on May 7, 2020, which included directives related to U.S. fisheries, international seafood trade, aquaculture production, and combating illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. E.O. 14276 identifies most American fish stocks as healthy and having “viable markets.” NMFS noted in its 2023 *Report to Congress on the Status of U.S. Fisheries*, the most recent such report, that 94% of the U.S. *stocks* and *stock complexes* for which *overfishing* status was known at the time were not subject to overfishing. Similarly, data in the report indicated that 82% of stocks and stock complexes for which *overfished* status was known at the time were not classified as overfished. Additionally, the report noted that nearly 30% of U.S. fish stocks and stock complexes have unknown overfishing status and that overfished status is unknown for approximately half of all U.S. fish stocks and stock complexes. Further, 51 U.S. stocks had been rebuilt from overfished conditions as of December 2024.

E.O. 14276 also notes concerns about the global competitiveness of U.S. seafood and domestic seafood markets as related to trade practices and regulation. The E.O. states that the majority of seafood consumed by Americans is imported and identifies a “seafood trade deficit” of “over \$20 billion.” According to NMFS annual commercial landings statistics and fishery trade data, in 2023, 91.6% of the total edible U.S. supply of fishery

products were identified as imported. Additionally, the volume of imported edible fishery products is approximately double that of U.S. domestically caught edible fishery products, with much of that domestic harvest ultimately exported. From 2019 to 2023, the difference in the total nominal value of imported and exported edible fishery products ranged from approximately \$17 billion to \$24.7 billion, with a difference of approximately \$20.4 billion in 2023 (i.e., greater imported value).

Directives for Fisheries Science and Management

E.O. 14276 states a U.S. policy “to promote the productive harvest of [U.S.] seafood resources” and to “unburden” commercial fishers from “costly and inefficient regulation” while also combatting IUU fishing and protecting U.S. seafood markets. Several of these elements also were identified in E.O. 13921. E.O. 14276 identifies U.S. seafood as being “heavily regulated” and lists several factors (e.g., “restrictive catch limits”) it identifies as impediments to fisheries harvest. Similarly, E.O. 13921 emphasized removal of “unnecessary regulatory burdens” to fishers. E.O. 14276 directs the Secretary—with input from other parties, including the U.S. fishing industry—to “immediately consider suspending, revising, or rescinding” regulations perceived as burdensome to commercial fishing, aquaculture, and fish processing industries. It further directs the Secretary to “identify the most heavily overregulated fisheries requiring action” and to “take appropriate action to reduce the regulatory burden on them,” in cooperation with U.S. Regional Fishery Management Councils (FMCs) and other relevant federal and public-private partnerships.

E.O. 14276 directs the Secretary to request that each FMC, within 180 days, provide updates to its recommendations pursuant to E.O. 13921 regarding regulation of domestic fishing practices and their management; such “identified actions should stabilize markets, improve access, enhance economic profitability, and prevent closures.” E.O. 13921 included that these recommendations are to be consistent with MSA and other applicable laws (e.g., the Marine Mammal Protection Act). FMCs are to commit to a work plan and an implementation schedule for prioritization of these actions. E.O. 14276 also directs the Secretary to solicit public comments, including from industry members, technology experts, marine scientists, and other relevant parties, for ideas to improve fisheries management and science within the requirements of MSA and other laws.

E.O. 14276 directs the Secretary to pursue additional public engagement to ensure executive departments and agencies “are focusing core fisheries management and science functions” to support U.S. seafood supply chain priority needs. With respect to fisheries science and technology, the

Secretary is to direct NMFS to incorporate cost-efficient technologies, and information collected from cooperative research with the fishing community, for conducting fishery assessments. The Secretary also is to expand exempted fishing permit programs with the intent of promoting nationwide fishing opportunities and to modernize data collection and analyses to improve fisheries management responsiveness to real-time ocean conditions.

Directives for U.S. Seafood Trade

Regarding U.S. seafood imports and exports, E.O. 14276 directs the Secretary, in consultation with the Secretary of Agriculture, to develop and implement a national seafood strategy to promote the production, sale, and trade of U.S. fishery and aquaculture products and to increase domestic processing capacity. The program is intended to accelerate Department of Agriculture efforts to educate U.S. consumers about seafood health benefits and to increase seafood purchases in nutrition programs. The E.O. also directs the Secretary and the United States Trade Representative (USTR)—the cochairs of the Interagency Seafood Trade Task Force (ISTTF) established under E.O. 13921—in consultation with members of the ISTTF, to assess seafood competitiveness issues and jointly develop a seafood trade strategy within 60 days. This strategy is to be based on the November 2020 Seafood Trade Strategy and is to address “unfair” seafood trade practices and domestic access to foreign markets. The USTR also is directed to examine trade practices of “major seafood-producing nations,” including any IUU fishing practices and use of forced labor in the seafood supply chain. Regarding these practices, the USTR is to consider appropriate responses, including through negotiations or trade enforcement authorities, such as Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974.

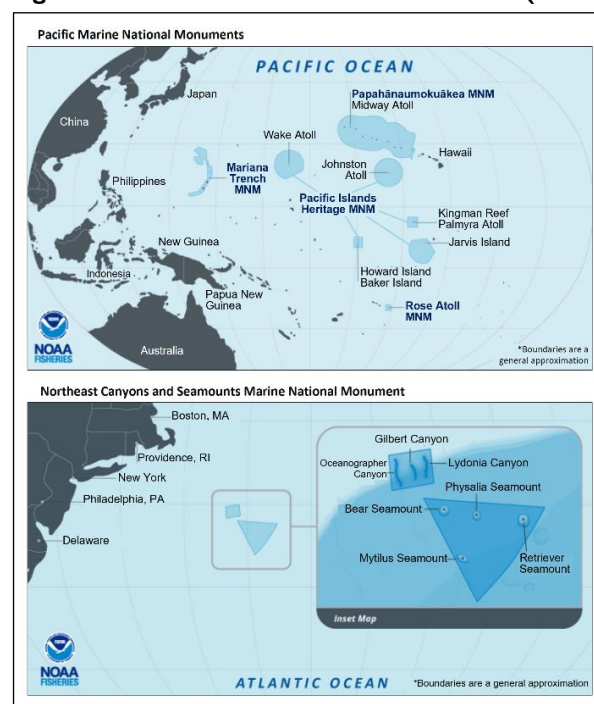
E.O. 14276 directs the Secretary, in consultation with the Secretary of Health and Human Services, the Secretary of Homeland Security, and other relevant agencies, to consider revising or rescinding expansions of the Seafood Import Monitoring Program (SIMP) regarding the inclusion of additional species and to improve the program’s effectiveness. The Secretary also is to consider using additional technologies to identify violations by foreign fisheries. In 2023, NMFS withdrew a proposed rule to expand the number of species covered under SIMP. Following a program review with stakeholder input, NMFS issued a November 2024 action plan for SIMP. Among its contents, the action plan intended for SIMP to cover all U.S. seafood imports, in addition to those determined to be at high risk for IUU fishing. The E.O. directs the Secretaries to use cost-effective and thorough auditing to prevent the U.S. entry of IUU seafood.

Marine National Monuments

E.O. 14276 directs the Secretary, in consultation with the Secretary of the Interior, to review the five MNMs (**Figure 1**) and provide recommendations to the President within 180 days regarding the opening of any to commercial fishing. The Secretary is to consider whether such opening of MNMs is consistent with the intent of preserving historic structures and other objects of historic or scientific interest. These directives align with an April 17, 2025, presidential proclamation preventing the Secretary from prohibiting

commercial fishing within 50-200 nautical miles of the Pacific Islands Heritage MNM’s landward boundaries

Figure 1. U.S. Marine National Monuments (MNM)



Sources: CRS and NOAA, NMFS, “Marine National Monuments.”

Considerations for Congress

In MSA, Congress requires fisheries management to be in accordance with 10 national standards (NS), such as the prevention of overfishing while achieving *optimum yield*. Congress may consider how directives in E.O. 14276 align with the 10 NS and other provisions in MSA, including those for fisheries science, and how future ocean conditions might affect their applications. Congress also may consider how data limitations for assessing the status of certain stocks may affect regulation or marketability, and the potential utility or cost-effectiveness of ecosystem-level management actions for regulating fisheries. In addition, Congress could amend MSA to codify or counter elements of E.O. 14276. In doing so, Congress might consider stakeholders’ perspectives supporting or opposing certain directives in the E.O. Congress also may consider its previous authorizations and directives regarding SIMP and the seafood trade, including commentary from some Members and stakeholders regarding SIMP’s effectiveness and future functioning (e.g., calls to expand or dismantle SIMP). Congress may consider how changes to fisheries regulations may affect other LMR-related provisions, such as marine mammal authorizations for categorized fisheries. Congress also may consider the alignment between presidential authorities for MNMs in the Antiquities Act of 1906 and in concurrent mandates for the conservation and management of fisheries and LMRs. Further, Congress may consider how the Administration’s budgetary and staffing priorities may align with implementing the science and management directives in E.O. 14276.

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