

AFS Policy Statement #30:
Responsible Use of Fish and Other Aquatic Organisms
(Abbreviated)

Issue Definition

The objectives of the American Fisheries Society (AFS), as cited in Article I, Part 2, of the Constitution, are to "promote the conservation, development, and wise use of fisheries," and to "promote and evaluate the development and advancement of all branches of fisheries science and practice." As inferred from its mission and objectives, the fundamental position of the AFS is that responsible human use of, and interaction with, fish and other aquatic organisms through management, research, and education is appropriate, desirable, and ethical.

Multiple interests in aquatic organisms and their use, however, may result in conflicting views about appropriate uses of specific fisheries. These interests may include those of commercial fishers, subsistence fishers, recreational anglers, trophy anglers, ceremonial users of fish and other aquatic organisms, naturalists, animal liberationists, and environmental activists as well as those who affect aquatic systems through industry and other forms of economic development. This wide range of perspectives leads to fundamental conflicts regarding the interaction of humans with fish and other aquatic organisms. Conflicts over human interactions with aquatic organisms have the potential to hinder management efforts aimed at providing human benefits from fisheries and ensuring longterm ecological sustainability. These conflicts may lead to threatening confrontations.

Congress passed the Animal Enterprise Protection Act of 1992 (P.L. 102-346) to protect persons engaged in almost any business related to animal industries from interference and damage from animal rights protests. Since then, participants in the animal rights movement in numerous states have pushed ballot initiatives, referenda, and statutes that pose the potential to significantly restrict all forms of fishing, conservation and fisheries management, and the use of fish and other aquatic animals in scientific research and education (Reiger 1997). Various anti-fishing protests have occurred in several countries around the world, consequently ending catch-and-release fishing in Germany and use of bait fish in Norway and the Netherlands. A review of the print media suggests that these protests have not yet posed a threat to fisheries management in North America that they have in Europe. Here, we address this debate and concern about the human use of fish and other aquatic organisms.

The AFS is committed to all branches of fisheries science and communication among fisheries professionals and between fisheries professionals and the public. The AFS recognizes the diversity of perspectives within our own membership and in the world but is committed to (a) making sustainability of the aquatic resources the common goal that brings together this diverse membership and (b) supporting diverse human uses of aquatic organisms that are consistent with this goal. The purpose of this position statement is to affirm explicitly that the AFS supports the broad range of consumptive and

nonconsumptive human interactions with aquatic organisms in a manner that ensures long-term ecological sustainability.