

through regional fisheries management organizations.

The sixth component of the National Bycatch Strategy directs NMFS headquarters staff to use gaps and funding needs identified by the Atlantic HMS team and regional teams as part of the first component of the National Bycatch Strategy, to use observer costs estimated by the national working group under the second component of the National Bycatch Strategy, as well as other sources, to identify new agency funding requirements and make recommendations to modify NMFS's comprehensive 5-year plan "NOAA Fisheries' Requirements for Improved and Integrated Conservation of

Fisheries, Protected Resources, and Habitat (Requirements Plan)." As this National Bycatch Strategy matures into a more robust strategy over coming months and years, funding needs and priorities will be revisited. The attainment of adequate funding is essential to the success of the National Bycatch Strategy.

NMFS will continue to build upon its accomplishments and accelerate its efforts in ensuring that renewed and revised objectives and strategies, as well as regional recommendations, from the 1998 *Managing the Nation's Bycatch*, the foundation for its National Bycatch Strategy, are fully implemented. We discussed the petition and NMFS'

efforts on bycatch at the January 2003 meetings of the Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee and the RFMC Chairs. NMFS will discuss our national strategy with these and other fisheries groups and non-government organizations and report progress on bycatch activities at periodic meetings and through the NMFS bycatch website (<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/bycatch.htm>).

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