

The screenshot shows the SeafoodSource website interface. At the top, there are logos for various Seafood Expo events (North America, Global, Asia) and social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. The main navigation menu includes: NEWS, BLOGS, EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES, COMMENTARY, SUPPLIER DIRECTORY, PREMIUM CONTENT, SEAFOOD HANDBOOK, and EVENTS. Below the menu is a search bar and a row of featured content banners, including one for UNIFILLER and another for LATITUDE 45. The article title is "Could fisheries policy change under Trump and Commerce Secretary Ross?" by Aaron Orłowski, published on Monday, March 13, 2017. A sidebar on the right contains a subscription prompt: "Want seafood news sent directly to your inbox?".

Since January, Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross, who oversees the nation’s fishery regulators, has offered hints that changes to U.S. fishery policy might be in store.

A formal fisheries policy has yet to emerge, and these are, of course, still early days for the Trump Administration. But some observers read in Ross’s recent statements a potential desire to increase fishing.

During the campaign, Trump railed repeatedly against the United States’ trade deficit. And Ross, during his Senate confirmation in January, expressed a wish to reverse the nation’s seafood trade deficit – a tall task given that the U.S. imports 90 percent of the seafood eaten here and has a USD 11 billion (EUR 10.3 billion) seafood trade deficit.

“Given the enormity of our coastlines, given the enormity of our freshwater, I would like to try to figure out how we can become much more self-sufficient in fishing and perhaps even a net exporter,” he said at his confirmation hearing in January, [according to Politico](#).

Then, [during his first address](#) to the department’s 47,000 employees, on 1 March, he listed a key challenge for the department of “obtaining maximum sustainable yield.” It was his only reference to the nation’s fisheries during the short speech.

"The Secretary's remarks reflect the importance our nation's marine and coastal fisheries resources, and his commitment to ensuring these resources are sustainable for generations to come," John Ewald, a spokesman for NOAA Fisheries, told SeafoodSource in an email.

How Ross views fisheries matters, since his department oversees both the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the National Marine Fisheries Service. Ross will make appointments to the nation’s regional fishery management councils, and the policies he advances will have profound effects on recreational and commercial fishermen.

Those policies could mark a sharp departure from the conservation-driven policies of the last eight years. The Recreational Fishing Alliance, an early supporter of Trump’s campaign for president, sees the potential for a new day under Trump, and hopes Ross will reverse the Obama administration’s policies.

“When we heard the new secretary wanted to go to MSY (maximum sustainable yield), that was music to our ears,” Jim Donofrio, the alliance’s executive director, told SeafoodSource. “Within this administration’s term, I think there’s going to be a wholesale change in how we manage fisheries.”

Those changes start with the reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the primary law governing the nation's fisheries, Donofrio said. The alliance wants to do away with the 10-year requirement to rebuild overfished stocks, implemented during the act's reauthorization in 1996. The group also wants stock assessments done by the states, rather than the federal government.

Many fish stocks have recovered in recent years, and Donofrio wants them opened to fishermen.

"They're sustainable, but they're very much not accessible. We have rebuilt stocks here that we can't access," Donofrio said.

The National Fisheries Institute, a trade group, takes a more cautious stance. Federal regulators at NOAA already manage fisheries in a sustainable way, allowing for fishing at maximum sustainable yield, Gavin Gibbons, a spokesman for the institute, told SeafoodSource.

"We pull as much fish out of the water as we possibly and sustainably can. But that is not enough to meet the demand for seafood in the U.S.," Gibbons said in an email.

Reversing the country's seafood trade deficit, as Ross said he wants to do, requires understanding the science of sustainability, Gibbons said. Harvesting too many fish too fast could deplete populations.

"This is not a situation where we just need to pull more fish out of our waters and then the trade deficit goes away," he said, adding that importing seafood creates jobs here, in sectors such as processing, cold storage, packing and distribution.

Deciphering the intents of the new administration so early into its tenure is a fraught business – especially for fisheries, which are governed by regional councils and complex rules.

Ross's remarks to Department of Commerce employees could be interpreted as an affirmation of existing U.S. fisheries policy, or as a signal that catch limits will soon rise. But Daniel Pauly, the principle investigator at the Sea Around Us project at the University of British Columbia, figures that Ross was probably just re-stating existing U.S. policy.

"Frankly, I believe that the Trump administration has other problems than going against the Magnuson-Stevens Act. Nobody cares about fisheries," Pauly said.

While the words "maximum sustainable yield" seem to suggest heavy fishing, the detailed regulations that govern the policy speak louder than Ross' words.

"In the fine print, you can only do that by rebuilding stocks, in other words, by conserving. And the law demands it," Pauly said. "I don't think they would spend political capital undoing that law."

Link: <http://www.seafoodsource.com/commentary/could-fisheries-policy-change-under-trump-and-commerce-secretary-ross>