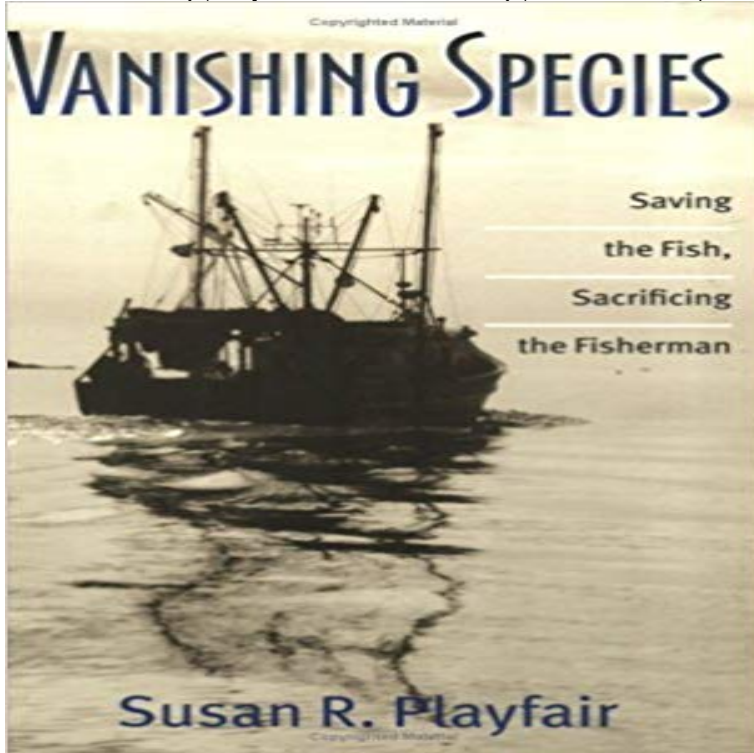


## Vanishing Species: Saving the Fish, Sacrificing the Fisherman



Vanishing Species chronicles the fate of groundfishing in New England waters since the Sustainable Fisheries Act (SFA) was enacted in 1996, causing increasingly strict regulations to be placed on the harvesting of fourteen species of edible fish. The SFA mandates that within a ten-year period, the stocks of these fish were to be brought up to levels prescribed by the government. To achieve this goal, strict regulations were put in place to limit net size, how many fish were caught, and the number of days fishermen could spend at sea. The SFA and regulations like it govern how, when, and where fishermen may fish. Since its inception, the SFA has been a fulcrum for escalating tensions between environmentalists, who argue that the mandates of the SFA are being ignored, and fishermen and their families, whose existence has come to depend on how government employees and a federal judge interpret the SFA. Although some scientists and environmentalists believe the fish stocks remain at levels too low to sustain further harvesting, many fishermen believe that the fish stocks are rising and that the governments means of measuring them is flawed. At the heart of the conflict is the survival of both the fish and the New England fishing communities. Playfair's compelling narrative brings the reader face-to-face with all aspects of this controversy. She examines the day-to-day business of groundfishing prior to the enactment of regulations, as well as the much-debated issue of farming fish through aquaculture as an alternative to harvesting fish from the sea. She asks how fish stocks fell so low that they became endangered, and she questions whether the fishermen are really at fault or simply are scapegoats for a larger problem. Playfair takes the reader onboard boats with different types of fishing gear; on voyages with scientists and fishermen seeking an equitable way to allow New England

fishermen to fish while maintaining the numbers of groundfish needed in order for the populations to spawn and grow; and into seafood restaurants where demand remains high and fresh fish are treated with the respect they deserve. If we lose the fisherman, Playfair reminds us, we lose our access to the fresh fish we now take for granted. The alternative may be a nomadic factory trawler--destructive to the environment, wasteful of the resource, and a sap to the soul of small coastal communities. Based in large part on interviews with a wide range of people--fishermen and their families, restaurant managers, environmentalists, fisheries scientists, politicians, and government officials--Vanishing Species offers a series of unforgettable portraits of people who are involved in the struggle to find a way to support sustainable fishing and the communities that rely on it.

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