This book is about the history of fish and people and how understanding that history might help preserve the future of fish and the well-being of people. Fish will not become fruitful and replenish marine ecosystems on demand, nor will pollution, rising temperatures, or other physical insults abate simply because we want them to go away. To restore the ocean, people must be convinced to change their behavior because no policy will work without citizen resolve.

Fisheries science is necessarily geared toward fishing industry, management, and policy. As in other economic sectors, management has unwittingly encouraged cycles of boom and bust. New technology and the creation of new markets for alternative fish species temporarily restored prosperity, but each success reset institutional memory. This final section examines the role of historical perspective in governance and evaluates the practical benefit of the lessons learned.

In chapter 10, we return to New England. Andy Rosenberg is a fisheries scientist and experienced fisheries manager with ten years in the trenches of the northeast region of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), two as regional administrator in Gloucester, Massachusetts, and two more years as deputy director in Silver Spring, Maryland. Since leaving the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Rosenberg has
written extensively on management and policy issues, served on the U.S. Oceans Commission, and advised the National Academy of Sciences and the United Nations on oceans policy issues. In the 1990s, he was at ground zero of the worst fisheries crisis in American history. His strong leadership reversed steep declines in a number of marine and anadromous species and set the bar for effective, though controversial, management.

In 1994, Rosenberg closed New England ground fisheries in order to rebuild cod, haddock, yellowtail flounder, and other stocks decimated by overfishing, which had accelerated in the 1980s. Fishermen were incensed, and, in 2002, some of them hung Rosenberg in effigy in Gloucester Harbor, protesting a new round of court-imposed restrictions aimed at rebuilding groundfish stocks. However, today haddock and sea scallops once again support valuable fisheries, and some other fish stocks are recovering. A few fishermen have even admitted privately that Rosenberg was right after all.

In 1999, Rosenberg also supported removing the Edwards Dam on Maine’s Kennebec River to restore spawning habitat for salmon, sturgeon, alewife, and other anadromous fish. After ten years the lower Kennebec showcases the local benefits of dam removal. Alewives now return in the millions. Ospreys, eagles, and seals compete with sport fish for the bounty, and boating, fishing, and other recreational activities thrive, supporting local enterprises.

Karen Alexander shows that fisheries management is not new. Regulations that look remarkably familiar date back to the Middle Ages in Europe and start in 1623 in New England. Jamie Cournane currently serves on the Atlantic Herring Plan Development Team of the New England Fishery Management Council. She has worked most recently on mapping hot spots of river herring bycatch by large trawlers and seiners that target Atlantic herring. She discusses the success stories and explains how historical perspectives are increasingly important in management. Chapter 10 shows how understanding of shifting baselines can help to restore the oceans—if we stay the course.

In chapter 11, Enric Sala and Jeremy Jackson present lessons learned in the warmer waters of the Mediterranean and the Caribbean. Rather than return to the broad questions raised by Carl Safina in chapter 1 and debated throughout this book—How should history influence marine science, how should science influence marine policy, and how do science and history leverage each other to greater effect?—Sala and Jackson conclude with a new set of criteria to determine whether or not historical marine ecology may eventually fulfill its promise.