



# NEWSCAST

The Newsletter of the Marine Recreational Information Program

**NOAA  
FISHERIES**



## June 4, 2013 In This Issue

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The Marine Recreational Information Program, or MRIP, is the way NOAA Fisheries is counting and reporting marine recreational catch and effort. It is a customer-driven initiative that not only produces better estimates, but does so through a process grounded in the principles of transparency, accountability and engagement.

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## Emerging Data Collection Technologies, Angler Confidence: Subject of Recent Congressional Hearing

The May 21 oversight hearing on data collection issues related to the reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Act featured a lot of discussion about the implementation of the Marine Recreational Information Program and building angler confidence in the recreational fisheries statistics we produce. There were also a number of comments about emerging electronic technologies and self-reported angler data. Below is a summary of these discussions and the ways MRIP is looking at these issues

### **Implementing MRIP**

During the hearing, NOAA Fisheries Chief Science Advisor Dr. Richard Merrick explained that survey methodologies are constantly evolving to meet stakeholder needs. This means that, while key elements of MRIP have already been implemented such as an [improved catch estimation method](#) and [new catch survey design](#), MRIP is an ongoing effort to meet the changing needs of recreational fisheries managers and anglers. That's why we're constantly evaluating the most efficient, cost-effective ways to collect and report accurate fisheries information.

Dr. Jay Breidt, a professor at Colorado State University and a member of the 2006 National Academies' National Research Council (NRC) Committee on the Review of Recreational Fisheries Survey Methods, noted in his testimony:

*"It is my opinion that the revised program is now fully developed in the sense that it is a dynamic system for implementing necessary revisions, creating state-of-the-art design and estimation procedures, and adapting to evolving scientific challenges. The program is transparent, accessible, and subjected to rigorous peer review. This is exactly the sort of statistical program envisioned in the NRC report: there could not be a static, one-time fix to the problems with MRFSS."*

### **Emerging Technologies**

Members of Congress expressed strong interest in the use of emerging technology to improve data collection such as products like iSnapper. MRIP has funded a number of completed, ongoing, and just-launching projects to determine which electronic technologies are best-suited for different types of recreational fisheries data collection, and how they can be used most effectively. The results of these pilot projects have and will continue to guide

our decision-making on adopting electronic reporting technologies. For a complete list of completed and ongoing MRIP projects, please visit our MRIP Project Database.

### **Alternative Data Sources**

Dr. Merrick testified during the hearing that NOAA Fisheries is open to working with academic institutions, independent organizations, and anglers in order to maximize data collection in the current resource-challenged environment.

MRIP is looking at ways to use alternative data sources within the context of the [National Research Council recommendations](#) to ensure the statistical validity of our methodologies. For example, Captain Mike Colby, a for-hire captain out of Clearwater, FL, [noted in his testimony](#) how recreational anglers are interested in providing information about their fishing trips and what they're catching outside of our existing surveys. Dr. Breidt noted during the hearing that while such "opt-in" information can be highly useful for some applications, it is not appropriate for others and cannot currently replace the current MRIP surveys for collecting catch and effort data.

As a launching off point for determining the best use of data gathered from the growing number of community monitoring programs - where anglers choose to submit their catch and activity using a logbook or electronic reporting system - MRIP and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council hosted a [workshop](#) on the subject in February 2012. This year, MRIP is funding a project to look at using data collected by a smartphone application.

### **Building Stakeholder Confidence**

Members of Congress also wanted to know about the ways MRIP is building stakeholder confidence. As Dr. Breidt mentioned in his testimony, the National Research Council found that building angler confidence is an important component in collecting accurate, timely recreational fisheries information.

Since the beginning, MRIP has been committed to transparency and engagement by keeping stakeholders apprised of process and progress every step of the way. Here are a few of the ways we're achieving greater confidence and credibility:

- An **Observer Team** made up of state partners, recreational fishing advocates, fishermen, and other external stakeholders played an important role in the process of [re-estimating historical catch](#) by using our improved estimation method. The team members participated in webinars and seminars led by our expert consultants. By watching firsthand this complex process unfold, the team members were able to ask questions along the way and guide our efforts to effectively communicate the changes to their colleagues and peers.
- We send out this regular **Newscast** to let anyone who's interested know what's happening with MRIP and ask questions to be answered in future issues.
- We work with an array of stakeholders to develop materials for each

major improvement we make. These include fact sheets, brochures, and videos that explain what we're doing, why we're doing it, and how it fits into the larger context of improved data collection and reporting. Our [video on improved estimation methods](#) was awarded a 2013 Gold Screen/Blue Pencil Award of Excellence from the National Association of Government Communicators.

- Last year, we conducted an MRIP **Road Show**, featuring presentations and listening sessions with constituents along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. The meetings provided anglers and other stakeholders with the opportunity to ask questions, share their ideas and concerns, and learn the latest MRIP news. As resources allow, we will conduct similar outreach in other regions.

Dr. Breidt also commented on the high level of scientific credibility MRIP has achieved. He praised our efforts to involve non-federal scientists in pilot projects and subject all our work to rigorous peer review. In so doing, MRIP has created a solid scientific basis on which to make additional improvements.

All of the panelists at the Hearing noted it's too early to call MRIP "mission accomplished." Our work to improve our surveys, keep up with emerging technologies, incorporate alternative data sources, and engage with stakeholders is ongoing and evolving.

Please continue to follow NOAA Fisheries efforts' to improve the quality of recreational fishing information [online](#) and keep letting us know how we can do better.

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## Ask MRIP

Do you have questions about MRIP or our surveys? Ask us and we'll answer your question in an upcoming newsletter. If you've got a question about MRIP that you'd like answered, please e-mail Leah Sharpe at [Leah.Sharpe@noaa.gov](mailto:Leah.Sharpe@noaa.gov).