

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



WHAT IS FISHERIES MANAGEMENT?

The Department of Commerce's NOAA Fisheries Service is entrusted with ensuring the long-term health of ocean fisheries and other marine life in federal waters. By doing so, NOAA helps saltwater anglers enjoy rewarding days on the water, commercial fishermen earn a good living, and residents living along our coasts experience a good quality of life.

NOAA Fisheries works with the state, eight regional fishery councils, and three interstate fisheries commissions to regularly review the health of hundreds of ocean fisheries. They use this information to decide how many fish can be taken recreationally and commercially without negatively affecting the long term health of individual fisheries. They also ensure appropriate measures are taken to recover fisheries in trouble.

WHY IS NOAA FISHERIES REDESIGNING ITS RECREATIONAL ANGLER SURVEYS?

As the science of fisheries management has evolved, so has the need for more thorough and detailed data about who is fishing, when they fish, and what species and how many fish they catch. In addition, managers need information that is timely and can be parsed by relatively small areas as opposed to broad swaths of ocean.

Simultaneously, recognition has grown in recent years of the economic and marine stewardship contributions made by recreational anglers. Capturing and sharing data that more precisely reflects these contributions is important in empowering anglers and other stakeholders to have a voice in decisions that affect them, and the oceans.

The Marine Recreational Information Program, or MRIP, is currently being phased in to address these issues and provide a reliable, transparent, collaborative set of tools that managers, anglers and others can use to ensure sustainable fisheries and healthy oceans for generations to come.

HOW IS THE NEW PROGRAM GOING TO BE DIFFERENT?

To facilitate the shift away from single-species management toward an ecosystem-based approach, the Marine Recreational Information Program will be more than a one-size-fits-all survey. Rather, the program will be made up of an interconnected system of surveys, each targeted toward particular segments of the fishing community (for-hire, private anglers, highly migratory species) and regions of the country. To ensure the integrity of the data and maintain scientific rigor, these regional surveys will all adhere to a consistent set of national standards. This allows NOAA, the states, the fishery management councils, and the recreational industry itself to most efficiently capture information from these important segments.

Anglers who participate in sampling efforts may not immediately notice many differences, as some of the changes to recreational fishing data program will be taking place behind the scenes. The process will be similar to rolling out a new car that looks similar to previous models, but under the hood is a completely redesigned engine.



DOES RECREATIONAL FISHING ACTUALLY HAVE THAT LARGE OF AN IMPACT?

Yes. Recreational fishermen play a significant role as both stewards and users of fisheries. For some species of fish, the recreational catch far outpaces the commercial harvest. In addition, in many communities, recreational fishing is a major economic driver, affecting everything from the hospitality industry to fuel sales to outfitters and small businesses. Accurately capturing the many contributions of recreational fishermen will help to ensure that these interests are properly considered in resource allocation and other policy matters.

HAS THE SPORTFISHING COMMUNITY BEEN INVOLVED WITH THE REDESIGN EFFORT?

Yes. Even the most statistically sound data program can only succeed when it has the support of those who collect, use, and are ultimately affected by the data. That's why many people, both inside and outside NOAA Fisheries, have been involved throughout the design and early implementation process.

NOAA Fisheries has established teams of experts from NOAA, state fisheries agencies, regional fisheries councils and interstate fisheries commissions, partner organizations, the conservation community, and other stakeholders to lead the development of distinct aspects of the Marine Recreational Information Program.

Everyone who has an interest and a stake in the process has been invited and encouraged to participate from the beginning, and the agency will continue to lead a cooperative and transparent redesign process.

(A complete roster of team members can be found at www.countryfish.noaa.gov)

WHAT WILL THE MARINE RECREATIONAL INFORMATION PROGRAM DO?

Fundamentally, MRIP will help NOAA achieve its mission of ensuring the sustainability of U.S. fisheries and the long-term health of our oceans. Specifically, the new survey will help managers better understand saltwater sportfishing's relationship to fisheries by better answering these fundamental questions: Who fishes? What's being caught? How many fish are caught? Where and when are people fishing?

Data collection has traditionally been conducted through telephone interviews and in-person field sampling. These practices are expected to continue with MRIP, but many survey elements related to both data collection and analysis will be updated and refined to address issues such as data gaps, bias, consistency, accuracy, and timeliness.

Among these improvements is the development of a national saltwater angler registry, providing a much more efficient and effective route for collecting data.

WHAT IS THE NATIONAL SALTWATER ANGLER REGISTRY?

The National Saltwater Angler Registry will be a "phone book" of sport fishermen. People who live in states that already gather information on saltwater anglers through things like saltwater fishing licenses will be automatically included in the registry assuming the state they live in enters into an Memorandum of Agreement to collect and share the necessary information with NOAA. Beginning in 2010, people who live in states without such a program will have to sign up with the Registry each year, and perhaps pay a fee.

When completed, the Registry will help reduce bias and improve the efficiency of catch and effort surveys. It also will give saltwater anglers better representation in the policy-making process.



WHY IS THE REGISTRY BEING CREATED?

The Registry will make it much more efficient to find anglers to survey, and it will include a broader representation of anglers. Instead of asking a random sample of coastal U.S. residents if they've gone fishing (what is currently done), the registry will allow surveyors to call upon those who have already identified themselves as saltwater fishermen. For example, if you needed a loaf of bread you wouldn't randomly visit a hardware store or a post office, you'd go directly to a grocery store. Likewise, if you want to know what anglers are catching, it's much more effective to go directly to the fishermen and ask.

ARE THERE ANY EXEMPTIONS FROM THE REGISTRY REQUIREMENT?

People who live in states that already have a program in place to gather the information necessary for the registry and have entered into an agreement with NOAA to share that information will be automatically included in the registry. Also, anglers who fish only on licensed party, charter, or guide boats will not be required to register with NOAA since these vessels are surveyed separately from angler surveys. Those who hold angler permits to fish for highly migratory species, such as tunas or swordfish, and those fishing under commercial fishing licenses or subsistence fishing permits will be exempt. Anglers registered or permitted to fish in a formal state or federal subsistence fishery will also be exempt, as will anglers under 16.

WHICH STATES HAVE A QUALIFYING LICENSING PROGRAM IN PLACE?

The majority of states have licensing or data collection programs in place that would enable them to enter into a Memorandum of Agreement with NOAA to share angler information required for the registry. Four states - Florida, South Carolina, Virginia, and Maryland - have saltwater fishing licenses that include exemptions that do not meet all the rule's requirements (e.g. shore angler exemption, boat licenses). These states must still apply for exempted state status. A number of states that are currently without any saltwater fishing license include Connecticut, Hawaii, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Maine, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and the western Pacific and Caribbean territories.

WHAT INFORMATION WOULD BE INCLUDED IN THE REGISTRY?

The goal is to collect just enough information to make it possible to correctly identify and contact anglers to conduct surveys about their catch and effort. Registrations will include an angler's name, date of birth, address, telephone number, and the regions where they intend to fish, though anglers will not be restricted to only those fishing in those regions, and will not be required to register separately for each region they fish in. As is the case already, surveys may be handled by representatives of NOAA Fisheries or state fisheries agencies.

WILL IT COST ANGLERS MONEY TO BE REGISTERED?

Fishermen who are automatically included in the registry because their state has a Memorandum of Agreement to share angler information with NOAA will NOT be required to pay a federal registration fee (though they will need to pay any costs associated with their state license). For others, Congress gave NOAA Fisheries the option of collecting a fee to cover the administrative costs of running the registry. There will be no charge for the registry until 2011, at which time it is expected to cost about \$25 for those required to pay. All fees collected through the Registry will go to the U.S. treasury, not a specific program.



DOES THE REGISTRY APPLY TO FISHING IN STATE WATERS?

Generally, no, but with some exceptions. Anglers must register if they fish in tidal waters for migratory fish such as striped bass and salmon that spawn in rivers and spend their adult lives in estuaries and oceans. However, those who fish recreationally for these migratory species inland of tidal waters need not register.