



# NEWSCAST

The Newsletter of the Marine Recreational Information Program

NOAA  
FISHERIES



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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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## MRIP Takes a Look at Improving Effort Surveys through Key Pilot Studies

*This is the first in a series of articles looking at improvements we're making to our surveys of recreational fishing effort (the number of trips anglers take during a reporting period).*

### Overview

One highly visible aspect of MRIP to date has been the improvements we've made to our **catch survey**-the tool we use to determine how many fish anglers are catching on a given trip, which species, size of the fish, and whether they were kept or discarded. You can learn more about the catch survey [here](#).

Less visible, but equally important, has been a series of studies we have conducted to identify and evaluate improvements to our complementary **effort surveys**. Effort surveys provide us with information about how many fishing trips are taken by recreational anglers. That information is coupled with the results of our estimates of catch per trip (based on our intercept survey) to determine an estimate of total recreational fishing catch, giving MRIP an overall picture of what's happening in the fishery.

### NRC Recommendations

In its 2006 review of NOAA Fisheries recreational data collection programs, the National Research Council (NRC) made key recommendations to improve our effort surveys:

- Consider alternatives to random-digit dialing, as this is an inefficient method for contacting anglers and complicated by increasing use of cell phones.
- Abandon random-digit dialing of coastal households in favor of a more efficient and potentially less biased **sample frame**, such as a list of recreational anglers. The NRC suggested the implementation of universal licensing or registration of saltwater fishermen, so that fishermen living in coastal *and noncoastal* areas could be more effectively contacted.

### Moving Beyond Random-Digit Dialing

To reach anglers for our surveys, NOAA has traditionally used a method called random-digit dialing (RDD) to contact households in coastal counties and interview recreational fishermen. RDD had been a universally accepted sampling approach, but there are also well-recognized shortcomings with this method:

- RDD does not efficiently identify anglers. Most calls go to households with no anglers, which increases the cost of collecting fishing data.
- Anglers who do not live in coastal counties are not called. Additionally, the survey does not include households without landline telephone service, which is a rapidly growing segment of the population. Excluding members of a population from a survey, such as households without landline telephones, is referred to as **undercoverage** and is a potential source of bias.
- Response rates are declining for most telephone surveys, regardless of the subject of the survey or the people who are being surveyed. As with undercoverage, nonresponse is a potential source of bias.

MRIP has sponsored a series of pilot studies testing alternatives to RDD for contacting anglers and collecting fishing effort data. As we will share in a follow-up article, some might find the results surprising.

### **Developing a National Registry**

One of MRIP's earliest initiatives was the creation of the National Saltwater Angler Registry, which incorporates angler data from state licensing and registration programs, as well as directly registering anglers in the few states that do not have registration programs of their own.

As the National Registry was being developed, we initiated a series of pilot studies to test the extent to which the information in the Registry would be a suitable sample frame for use in conducting our effort surveys. To make sure that our studies were not biased by the natural lag time that might occur between the enacting of new licensing requirements and people fully complying, we started with states that had long histories of recreational saltwater registration. Results of these studies will be covered in our next issue.

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### **In the Next Newscast:**

Using license and registration information for sample frames

What's the best way to reach anglers in the digital age?

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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).

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