

# Marine Recreational Information Program Initiative

*Working together to become the trusted source for saltwater recreational fishing data*

New regulatory mandates have led to ever-greater demands for more timely and accurate data on saltwater recreational fishing. An initiative is underway to build a new program to improve the collection, analysis, and use of recreational saltwater fishing information.

## Bringing the Best Minds Together

NOAA Fisheries oversees several data collection and analysis programs to track a host of factors affecting fisheries populations, ranging from commercial discards to recreational fishing catch rates to habitat quality. The combination of all this information gives policy-makers the information they need to make sound conservation decisions.

Today, NOAA Fisheries, state natural resource agencies, and community partners are working together to revamp saltwater angler surveys, which are among the most important data collection tools. Because so much has changed since NOAA Fisheries launched its original recreational fishing data program, the agency is bringing the best minds together, inside and outside the agency, to develop a new survey program to meet the needs of today's fisheries managers. The idea is to address ever-greater demands for more timely and accurate data on saltwater recreational fishing.

## Answering the Important Questions

NOAA Fisheries' original recreational fishing data program, the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Surveys, will be phased out over the next several years. The new program is called the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). Quite simply, the new survey will better answer these fundamental questions: Who fishes? What's being caught? How many fish are caught? Where and when are they caught? In addition, a new saltwater angler registry will give the agency a more definitive pool of survey participants to call upon, at the same time giving saltwater anglers better representation in the decision-making process.

## Partnering for the Common Good

The most important federal law related to ocean fisheries is the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Under this law, NOAA Fisheries oversees a network of authorities who regularly monitor the health of hundreds of ocean fisheries. They use this information to decide how many fish can be taken commercially and recreationally without negatively affecting the long-term health of individual fisheries. They also ensure appropriate measures are taken to recover fisheries in trouble.

State governments also have an important role in conserving ocean fisheries because many saltwater fish thrive in coastal areas or migrate inland. Since many fish also migrate across state boundaries, the federal-state partnership approach is imperative in ensuring the health of these fisheries.

Countless private organizations have strong interests in protecting ocean fisheries, too. Sometimes partners' interests conflict, creating intense debate and challenging decision-making about fisheries conservation. But this does not take away from partners' roles as strong advocates for fisheries conservation who have valuable expertise, perspectives, and resources to share.

## **Looking Out on the Horizon**

The new Marine Recreational Information Program is designed to improve the methodology of collection and analysis of saltwater recreational fishing data. Ultimately, it will help decision-makers gain a far better understanding of saltwater recreational fishing's relationship to fisheries conservation.

Beyond the numbers, the Marine Recreational Information Program also will help all of us who care about the health of ocean fisheries and the sport of fishing to pass on these strong conservation values to future generations.

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