



Contact: Monica Allen
301-713-2370
Monica.allen@noaa.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Dec. 23, 2008

NOAA to Create Saltwater Angler Registry in 2010

Final rule gives states more time to implement local data gathering

NOAA's Fisheries Service released its final rule today to create a national saltwater angler registry of all marine recreational fishermen to help the nation better protect our shared marine resources. A requirement to establish a registry was included in a statute approved by Congress in 2007.

"Better national surveys of the nearly 15 million saltwater anglers will help us demonstrate the important contributions of recreational anglers to both local economies and to the nation's," said Jim Balsiger, NOAA acting assistant administrator for NOAA's Fisheries Service. "The registry will help us gather comprehensive data to ensure sustainable fisheries built on the best available science."

The improved quality of recreational fishing data achieved through a national saltwater angler registry will help demonstrate the economic value of saltwater recreational fishing, and will provide a more complete picture of how recreational fishing is affecting fish stocks. This kind of information is essential to NOAA's goal to end overfishing as required under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. All recreational anglers who fish in federal waters will be required to participate, with some exemptions for those already registered in their states.

The registry is the product of a major recommendation to NOAA in a 2006 independent scientific review by the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences. The NRC found that NOAA needed a comprehensive list of everyone who fishes recreationally in marine waters to improve surveys of saltwater anglers used to help manage and rebuild fish stocks. The NRC recommendation became law in 2007 with the reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the primary federal law that enables NOAA to manage ocean fish stocks.

The final rule requires anglers and spearfishers who fish recreationally in federal ocean waters to be included in the national saltwater angler registry by Jan. 1, 2010.

Beginning January 2009, NOAA will exempt anglers from the federal registration rule if they are licensed in states that have a system to provide complete information on their saltwater anglers to the national registry.

"NOAA wants to work closely with the states and anglers to better capture the contributions and effects of sportfishing," said Balsiger. "We expect that this additional year will allow a number of states to put in place systems to register their anglers annually and provide this information to NOAA."

NOAA had originally proposed that registration be required beginning Jan. 1, 2009, but based on public input decided to give states another year to put in place their own data collection systems.

If anglers are not licensed or registered by a state that has been exempted and want to fish in federal waters, they will be required to register with NOAA. They must also 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, according to the final rule.

Federal saltwater angler registrations will include an angler's name, date of birth, address, telephone number, and the regions where they intend to fish. This information will be used by NOAA to conduct surveys on fishing effort and amounts of fish caught. Once anglers have registered, they may fish anywhere in U.S. federal waters, or in tidal waters for anadromous species, regardless of the region or regions they specified in their registration. The registration will be valid for one year from its date of issue. Anglers must comply with applicable state licensing requirements when fishing in state waters.

Saltwater anglers will be able to register online or by calling a toll-free telephone number that will be publicized, and will receive a registration certificate. Anglers will need to carry this certificate (or their state license from an exempt state) and produce it to an authorized enforcement officer if requested. No fee will be charged in 2010. An estimated fee of \$15 to \$25 per angler will be charged starting in 2011.

Anglers who fish only on licensed party, charter, or guide boats would 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 will also 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.

NOAA received nearly 500 comments from anglers, state officials, and fishing and environmental organizations on its proposed national registry rule during the comment period from June 12 until Aug. 21. The registry is one component of the agency's new Marine Recreational Information Program, an initiative to enhance data collection on recreational catch and effort.

To read the final registry rule and other information about the Marine Recreational Information Program, go to: <http://www.countmyfish.noaa.gov>

NOAA understands and predicts changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and conserves and manages our coastal and marine resources. Visit <http://www.noaa.gov>.

On the Web:

NOAA's Fisheries Service: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>