

## **National Saltwater Angler Registry Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What's the issue?**

Congress, through the recently reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Act, called on NOAA to take the lead in creating a national registry of saltwater anglers.

### **Why is NOAA in charge of creating a registry?**

NOAA is the logical choice because it's the federal agency with primary responsibility for governing marine resources in federal waters. Given that most fishing takes place in state waters, counting saltwater anglers is more than just a federal issue, however. NOAA, the coastal states, and the interstate marine fisheries commissions are collaborating on shared approaches to creating a registry.

### **Why do we need a registry to account for all saltwater anglers?**

An angler registry moves us down the road to better recreational fishing data. It does so in two ways – first it creates a universe of saltwater anglers, essentially a phonebook of fishermen, and second it uses that phone directory to reduce bias and improve the efficiency of catch and effort surveys. Instead of asking a random sample of coastal U.S. residents if they've gone fishing, an angler registry would allow us to target surveys only to those Americans that have identified themselves as saltwater fishermen. For example, if you wanted a loaf of bread you wouldn't randomly visit a hardware store or a post office. No, you'd go directly to a grocery store. Likewise, if you want to know what anglers are catching, you'd go right to a fisherman and ask.

### **Is there a difference between a registry and a license?**

Yes. A registry is like a national phonebook containing the names and contact information of saltwater anglers. By itself, a saltwater fishing license is not a registry. Rather a license is just one way to get the contact information contained in a registry. A registry that many people are familiar with is the "do not call" telemarketing list. Instead of using a license to add names to the list, the "do not call" registry allowed people to voluntarily register by visiting a website or calling a number on their own.

### **Don't most states already have a saltwater fishing license?**

Many states do have some kind of fishing license for saltwater anglers. In those states, the actual requirements for who has to have a license vary from state to state. States that are currently without any saltwater fishing license include Maine, New Hampshire,

Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Hawaii and the western Pacific and Caribbean territories.

**Are there any exemptions from the federal registry requirement?**

Yes, Congress gave anglers who are licensed or registered by the states an exemption from the federal requirement, but only if a state can provide NOAA with certain information about anglers in their state. The Magnuson-Stevens Act says that a state can get a pass on the federal registry if 1) it already has a program to count all of its saltwater anglers (e.g. through a comprehensive saltwater fishing license) or 2) “the Secretary of Commerce determines that information from the State program is suitable for the Secretary’s use or is used to assist in completing marine recreational fisheries statistical surveys, or evaluating the effects of proposed conservation and management measures for marine recreational fisheries.” In other words, the state has to be able to either account for their anglers themselves or provide information on their fishing activity to the federal government.

**What information does the federal government need from the states?**

Just enough information to contact an angler so the federal government could conduct an angler survey for effort. Alternatively, if the states conduct the surveys, they could provide the federal government with the effort information directly. More specific information about minimum data requirement and acceptable state fishing license exemptions will be more clearly spelled out when NOAA releases a Proposed Rule on the matter later this fall. A public comment period will follow the release of the proposed rule.

**Does the federal saltwater angler registry apply to fishing in state waters?**

Generally, no, but with one major exception. Congress specified that the federal registry would only apply to those fishing in federal waters and for anadromous species in any waters, including those in state jurisdiction. In other words, even anglers in non-coastal states like Idaho or Pennsylvania would have to register to fish for salmon or striped bass. The Great Lakes would not be subject to the registry.

**So anglers fishing only in state waters wouldn’t need to register?**

Anglers would need to register only if they are fishing for anadromous fish such as striped bass, shad, and salmon. Those anglers not fishing for anadromous fish would have no requirements whatsoever. This is an obvious gap that would impact the benefits of using an angler registry to conduct surveys. That’s one reason why NOAA and states are working together to ensure there is a complete accounting of anglers whether they fish in state or federal waters.

**When would a federal saltwater angler registry requirement go into affect?**

Congress set a January 1, 2009 for establishing a national saltwater angler registry.

**Will it cost money to register?**

It could. Congress gave NOAA the option of collecting a fee to cover administrative costs of running a registry, but not before 2011. Any fees collected through a federally-operated registry would go directly into the U.S. Treasury and would not necessarily help support fisheries conservation efforts. In contrast, fees collected through a state's fishing license program are returned to the state to support fishing and boating conservation and access programs.

**Isn't this just a tax on fishing?**

A federal registry or state saltwater fishing license could indeed cost anglers money. Both Congress and the National Academy of Sciences, an independent panel of scientists, recommended creating a phonebook of saltwater anglers in order to help improve recreational fishing data. The hope is that whatever extra fees anglers must pay will be offset by more accurate and timely data leading to more credible management decisions and improved fishing opportunities.