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**NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL TO STUDY NOAA'S RECREATIONAL DATA
COLLECTION PROGRAM**

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service Director Bill Hogarth has asked the National Research Council to conduct a thorough review of the agency's recreational fishing data collection program. Undertaken as part of the agency's newly developed strategic plan for recreational fisheries, this project responds to fisheries managers' increasing need for timely information on recreational fishing effort, catches and landings. NOAA is an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Detailed recreational catch and participation data are the foundation of effective fishery conservation measures. Because an estimated 17 million Americans fish in saltwater each year, accurate recreational fishing information is increasingly important in ensuring the long-term health of the resource. Data collection programs support socio-economic analyses of the recreational fishery, allowing fishery managers to assess the impact of regulations on communities and businesses.

"Our current efforts, while providing excellent information, are not keeping pace with the evolving needs of managers," Hogarth said. "We need to continue to expand and improve our data collection program to ensure that our nation's fisheries are managed properly."

Currently, NOAA Fisheries collects information on the amount of fish caught and number of anglers on the water through a variety of programs. The program most widely used is the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey. This random-sample survey conducted by telephone and dockside interviews, provides reliable information on catch trends but often is not sufficiently detailed to provide the real-time data now required for in-season quota management.

The National Research Council, a private, nonprofit, congressionally chartered organization, provides independent science, technology and policy advice to government agencies. The NRC will evaluate NOAA's current program and make recommendations as to how the agency might better match its data collection efforts with the needs of managers. The review will be completed in April 2006.

NOAA Fisheries is dedicated to providing and preserving the nation's living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources.

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On the Web:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

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