

Science, Service, Stewardship



NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE

Recreational Fisheries at NOAA: A Growing Legacy

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NOAA



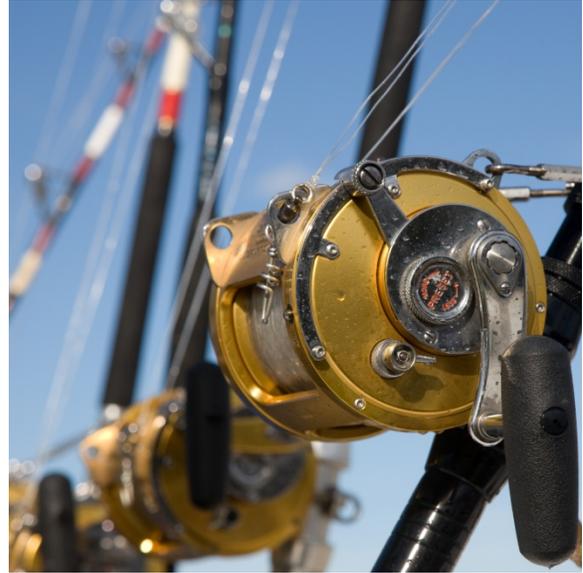
Commitment and Dedication

NOAA embarked on a focused effort in September 2009, referred to as the *Recreational Fisheries Engagement Initiative (Engagement Initiative)*, to establish a strong and trusting partnership with the recreational fishing community. The *Engagement Initiative* is about listening to anglers, developing actions to address priority issues, following through on commitments, and empowering anglers as responsible stewards and resource users.

NOAA has committed to a broad set of actions on three recent occasions: when announcing the *Engagement Initiative* (September 2009); during the National Recreational Saltwater Fishing Summit (April 2010); and, finally within the Recreational Saltwater Fishing Action Agenda (October 2010), and we are living up to those commitments. With the guidance and input of the recreational fishing community, NOAA has fulfilled many of our commitments and is making substantive progress on many others. This document identifies important steps taken by NOAA since the Recreational Summit to strengthen ties between NOAA and the recreational fishing community, encourage participation in the management process, and ensure a satisfying recreational fishing experience today, tomorrow, and for generations of anglers to come.

Building trust through transparency, cooperation, and communication

Stewardship that safeguards the resource and satisfies the needs of resource users can only be accomplished within the context of a trusting relationship, the foundation of which includes transparency in decision making, cooperation, and open two-way communication. Building trust in this way underpins NOAA's *Engagement Initiative* and served as a core set of principles for



Healthy and vibrant recreational fisheries are an essential component of NOAA Fisheries' vision of the oceans for this and future generations.

the Recreational Saltwater Fishing Summit. As stated in the Recreational Fisheries Action Agenda, NOAA is striving to:

- Provide opportunities for regular, two-way communication;
- Provide communications aimed at clearly answering constituent questions;
- Work within the confines of our legal mandates and established processes, but not use these systems as an excuse for being non-responsive or for failing to consider new ideas;
- Provide information to avoid surprises and ensure stakeholders are aware of the thinking behind Agency decisions.

Our staff is working hard to keep recreational fisheries issues front and center in our day to day considerations and decisions. However, to be fully successful, we need your help in these efforts, including

honest and thoughtful input, guidance, and feedback.

Taking action in response to angler concerns

The Recreational Saltwater Fishing Summit was recognition that sustainably managing our common ocean resources is a job best accomplished in partnership, and sought to strengthen the relationship between NOAA Fisheries and the recreational fishing community. With more than 100 participants from across the nation, the Summit brought focus to the most pressing issues facing our recreational fisheries, including the quality and timeliness of recreational catch and effort data, concerns over catch shares, and recreational representation in the management process. Equally as important, Summit participants told us that follow-through would be the critical measure of success.

The Recreational Saltwater Fishing Action Agenda (October 2010) was NOAA's response to the ideas expressed by Summit participants. It identified a number of preliminary actions and has served as a roadmap for Agency efforts to address priorities and concerns self-identified by the recreational fishing community. The Action Agenda identified a priority group of

signature issues and a larger set of goals and detailed objectives.

Importance of recreational fishing

We appreciate that recreational fishing is part of the history and fabric of our nation and will work hard to build upon this great tradition. Fishing has always been an important social activity promoting stronger families and communities; providing both employment and a way of life for many; and, serving as a large economic driver at all levels—locally, regionally, and nationally.

Recent estimates indicate that there are approximately 12 million saltwater recreational anglers taking about 85 million trips a year. Combined, expenditures total \$31 billion dollars, representing an \$82 billion dollar impact and supporting half a million jobs.

Just as important as these facts is the legacy of recreational fishermen as conservationists concerned about the health and sustainability of the marine environment. By practicing catch and release techniques, advocating for and participating in the development of better fisheries data and science, and engaging in the policy process, recreational anglers continue to effect positive change and ensure their voice is heard.

Key Accomplishments

There were many recent accomplishments beyond holding the Recreational Summit and releasing the Action Agenda which demonstrate a significant positive shift in NOAA Fisheries responsiveness to the recreational fishing community and its priorities.

Improving information

After identification by the recreational fishing community as a top priority, NOAA Fisheries undertook numerous projects to improve data collection and estimation methodologies including:

- Implementation of the National Angler registry to increase efficiency in developing recreational fishing effort estimates (*January 2010*);
- Implementation of an improved methodology to provide more accurate recreational catch estimates (*January 2011*);
- Hosting a workshop examining the science supporting the determination of recreational and commercial Annual Catch Limits (*February 2011*);
- Hosting an expert workshop examining methods to improve the timeliness of delivery of recreational catch estimates and associated trade-offs (*March 2011*);
- Implementation of multiple pilot recreational data collection projects, such as the For-hire Electronic Logbook, to streamline and improve data collection;
- Implementation of the 2011 National Angler Expenditure Survey to provide better and updated economic data on recreational fishing (*March 2011*);
- Initiation of a review to identify gaps in NOAA Fisheries' recreational socio-economic data and data collection systems;
- Providing increased funding for recreational data collection programs and improved stock assessments.

Taken in combination, along with many other projects and actions not cited here, NOAA Fisheries is improving how data is collected and used which will provide managers with better information on which to base decisions.

Demonstrating Responsiveness and Improving Decision-Making

Working to improve responsiveness to recreational fishing community priorities is a cornerstone of our efforts. After hearing from anglers, NOAA Fisheries:

- Successfully championed recreational fisheries in the interagency National Oceans Policy process and significantly expanded their consideration in the final policy document;
- Incorporated substantial changes to the National Catch Shares Policy important to recreational fishermen including addressing the issues of allocation, inter-sector transfer, and distinctions between the for-hire and private recreational angling sectors;
- Engaged the Councils and constituents in a discussion of allocation issues;
- Initiated efforts to identify and expand, as appropriate, flexibility in implementation of National Standard 1;

- Responded to angler concerns and comments over the 2009 South Atlantic red snapper assessment by expediting an assessment update (2010) which allowed for the elimination of a large proposed closed area;
- Increased data collection and funded more timely data analysis in the Gulf of Mexico for-hire fishery (2010) which contributed to the decision to allow the recreational GOM red snapper fishery to reopen in the fall of 2010;
- Worked to increase Fishery Management Council (FMC) awareness of recreational issues through presentation of a recreational training module during FMC new member training for the first time, regular participation of the National Policy Advisor in FMC meetings, and regular presentations to the Council Coordinating Committee (Council Chairs and Executive Directors) on recreational issues.

Empowering anglers

Two important steps to empowering anglers are ensuring their voice is heard within the management process and increasing their roles as citizen scientists. To accomplish these objectives, NOAA Fisheries:

- Expanded opportunities for input by the recreational fishing community through the appointment of the Marine Fisheries Advisory Council Recreational Fisheries Working Group;
- Enhanced its ability to receive input from the recreational fishing community and follow-through on commitments by appointing the National Policy Advisor for Recreational Fisheries as well as NMFS Regional Recreational Fisheries Coordinators;
- Included the National Policy Advisor for Recreational Fisheries in the fishery management council appointment process;
- Provided funding for and conducted a national workshop on minimizing the mortality of recreationally released fish and barotrauma;
- Affirmed the role of recreational fishermen as citizen scientists, by funding cooperative research projects with anglers such as determining post release survivorship using alternative angling techniques in the recreational fishery for common thresher sharks in Southern California, as well as contracting with recreational fishermen as sentinels in the BP-Deepwater Horizon Oil spill through inclusion in water and fish sampling programs.

While much work remains to fulfill all of our initial commitments, we hope you share our optimism that it has been a productive year since the Recreational Saltwater Fisheries Summit.

The Path Forward

To improve and expand our nation's great tradition of recreational fishing will take continued careful planning, consideration, and teamwork. Management actions must occur within the bounds of good science and the law. For our part, NOAA will continue to be forthright, provide accurate information as quickly as possible, and be willing to work hard to identify and explore creative solutions. We hope you will join us in these efforts.

The Recreational Fishing Engagement Initiative is a long-term adaptive program intended to strengthen the fundamental relationship between NOAA Fisheries and the recreational fishing community by building trust through transparency, cooperation, communication, and action. While the past year's work represents an earnest start in this effort, many of the most challenging and long-term issues remain.

With roughly two-thirds of the Recreational Fisheries Action Agenda either completed or underway, NOAA Fisheries will continue forward with its implementation. Among other actions, we will:

- Continue to participate in discussions on quota allocation issues with Councils and constituents;
- Continue to engage with stakeholders and councils on implementation of Annual Catch Limits and Coastal Marine Spatial Planning;
- Release and implement regional recreational action agendas;
- Improve recreational socio-economic information through completion of a data gap analysis and holding internal and stakeholder workshops to discuss the findings;
- Seek opportunities to strengthen angler involvement within the National Sanctuaries Program;
- Identify tangible steps to improve habitat for recreationally important species;
- Continue to address survivorship of recreationally released fish;
- Host a symposium on managing recreational fisheries at the 2011 American Fisheries Society meeting.

To effectively engage on these complex issues will require NOAA Fisheries to substantially improve two-way communications; both distributing information and truly hearing constituents' concerns, priorities, and ideas. NOAA Fisheries will also remain flexible and responsive to new issues, concerns, and opportunities to improve stewardship through partnership.



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