CORRESPONDENCE

From: **Tyler McLaughlin** <pinwheeltunafishing@gmail.com>
Date: Wed, Oct 21, 2026 at 10:37 PM
Subject: Demand for Strong Restrictions on Industrial Midwater Trawling and Protection of Atlantic Forage Fish

Dear Members of the New England Fishery Management Council,

I am writing to demand decisive action against the continued operation of industrial midwater trawling in U.S. waters. The use of enormous nets, powerful vessels, and increasingly efficient fishing technology to remove massive quantities of forage fish raises serious concerns about the future of our fisheries, marine ecosystems, and coastal fishing communities.

How many times must we repeat the mistakes that contributed to the collapse of New England's cod fisheries before we change course?

The collapse of our groundfish fisheries demonstrated the devastating consequences that can result when fishing pressure, technological efficiency, environmental changes, and management failures combine. Allowing large vessels to fish inshore and in shallow waters where there're gear is to efficient at harvesting shouldn't be allowed. That is exactly what happens to the cod fish . We cannot undo that history, but we can learn from it.

Instead, we continue to allow industrial fishing vessels with enormous nets and substantial horsepower to harvest schooling fish on a scale that smaller commercial fishermen cannot compete with. These vessels can remove large quantities of fish in a single operation, placing tremendous pressure on the species that sustain our marine ecosystem.

Have we learned nothing from the collapse of the cod fishery?

1. Industrial midwater trawling threatens the foundation of the marine food web

Atlantic herring and Atlantic mackerel are not simply commercial commodities. They are essential forage species that support tuna, cod, haddock, striped bass, marine mammals, seabirds, and other marine wildlife.

Removing large quantities of these fish can reduce prey availability, disrupt predator-prey relationships, and create consequences that extend far beyond the targeted fishery.

The Council must consider the cumulative ecological effects of industrial harvesting instead of focusing narrowly on whether vessels comply with annual catch limits.

A fishery can comply with a quota and still raise legitimate concerns about its effects on the wider ecosystem. Catch limits must be supported by reliable data, conservative

assumptions where uncertainty exists, and a clear commitment to protecting the long-term productivity of marine resources.

2. These industrial vessels do not belong in sensitive coastal fishing grounds

I urge the Council to support the removal of industrial midwater-trawl vessels from critical forage-fish habitat and sensitive coastal waters.

The United States should pursue a prohibition on industrial midwater trawling within 200 nautical miles of its coastline, subject to applicable federal law and international agreements, while immediately prioritizing restrictions in important forage-fish habitat and other ecologically sensitive areas.

These vessels have the capacity to harvest fish on a scale that can overwhelm local fishing activity and create substantial ecological pressure. Our coastal waters should not be treated as an unlimited industrial extraction zone simply because modern technology makes it possible to remove fish rapidly.

The Council should use its management role to advocate for meaningful restrictions, coordinate with NOAA Fisheries and other responsible authorities, and identify the strongest legally defensible measures available.

3. Inadequate independent monitoring is unacceptable

The Atlantic herring industry's industry-funded monitoring program was suspended beginning in April 2023 because federal funding was unavailable for NOAA Fisheries' responsibilities. Although selected vessels remain subject to federal observer requirements, not every trip is guaranteed to have an independent observer aboard.

This raises legitimate concerns about whether all incidental catch, discards, and other fishing impacts are being independently verified.

Large midwater nets can encounter non-target species, including river herring, shad, and groundfish. Protected-species interactions also require effective safeguards and reporting.

How can the public have confidence in a fishery's total environmental impact when independent monitoring is not consistently present on every trip?

The Council should support:

- 100% independent monitoring through qualified human observers or independently audited electronic monitoring. Seek other fisherman to volunteer from other fisheries to fill this role.
- Verified reporting of all retained catch, discards, and relevant incidental mortality.

- Enforceable bycatch limits and meaningful penalties for violations.
- Public access to monitoring data and transparent reporting of compliance. Live Camera footage provided to the public of haul backs.
- Precautionary management whenever data gaps prevent reliable estimates of total fishing mortality.

The absence of verified information must never be treated as evidence that a fishery's impacts are insignificant.

4. We must not repeat the mistakes of the cod collapse

New England's cod collapse should serve as a permanent warning about the consequences of failing to control fishing mortality and account for the limits of marine ecosystems.

The collapse had multiple causes, including excessive fishing pressure, technological advances, management shortcomings, and environmental changes. The lesson is not that one fishing method caused every problem. The lesson is that efficient harvesting capacity must never be allowed to outrun the ability of science and management to protect the resource.

We should not wait for herring, mackerel, or other important forage species to suffer severe declines before acting.

If scientific uncertainty remains, management should become more precautionary, not less restrictive. The Council must evaluate the effects of industrial fishing on predators, competing fisheries, and the wider food web—not merely whether a fleet has stayed within its permitted tonnage.

5. International governments have demonstrated that industrial trawling can be restricted

The United States should examine international examples of governments imposing significant restrictions on industrial fishing gear.

- **Venezuela** prohibited industrial trawling in its national waters in 2009.
- **Hong Kong** implemented a trawling ban effective December 31, 2012.
- **Palau** has prohibited bottom trawling within its jurisdiction and adopted additional restrictions concerning its nationals and companies operating elsewhere.
- **Chile** has prohibited bottom trawling on seamounts and adopted other protections for vulnerable marine ecosystems.
- **Greece** announced plans to prohibit bottom trawling in designated marine parks and protected areas.

These examples primarily concern bottom trawling or industrial trawling more generally; they should not be misrepresented as nationwide bans on midwater trawling. Nevertheless, they demonstrate that governments can place meaningful limits on industrial fishing gear to protect marine ecosystems.

The Council should evaluate these approaches and identify comparable protections that can be implemented in U.S. waters.

6. Protect independent fishermen and coastal communities

The impacts of industrial forage-fish harvesting extend beyond the industrial vessels themselves.

Independent commercial fishermen, recreational anglers, charter operators, and coastal businesses all depend on healthy marine populations. When forage fish become less available, the consequences can spread throughout the ecosystem and affect the long-term economic viability of other fisheries.

Management decisions must account for these broader costs. The public interest is not served when short-term industrial harvesting takes priority over the long-term health of shared marine resources.

The Council should be willing to challenge established industrial fishing practices when conservation requires it.

7. Actions requested of the Council

I respectfully demand that the New England Fishery Management Council:

1. Support a federal prohibition on industrial midwater trawling in critical forage-fish habitat and other scientifically identified sensitive areas. Stellwagon Bank, Gulf of Maine.
2. Advocate for a prohibition on industrial midwater trawling within 200 nautical miles of the U.S. coastline, subject to applicable law and international agreements.
3. Support 100% independent monitoring or independently audited electronic monitoring for applicable industrial fisheries.
4. Require transparent, verified catch and bycatch reporting, with enforceable limits and meaningful penalties for violations.
5. Evaluate the cumulative ecosystem effects of industrial herring and mackerel harvesting, including the implications for predators and competing fisheries.
6. Apply precautionary catch limits where monitoring gaps or scientific uncertainty prevent reliable estimates of total fishing mortality.

7. Examine international restrictions on industrial trawling and pursue the strongest legally available measures for U.S. waters.
8. Publicly explain what steps the Council will take to prevent further damage to forage-fish populations and protect the long-term health of our marine ecosystems.
9. Coordinate with NOAA Fisheries and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council where fisheries, vessels, and conservation concerns overlap across management boundaries.

Conclusion: The time for excuses has passed

The collapse of New England's cod fisheries should have permanently changed our approach to fisheries management. It demonstrated that marine resources are not unlimited and that the consequences of poor management can last for generations.

We cannot continue allowing industrial harvesting capacity to expand while the public is left questioning whether monitoring is adequate and whether the wider ecosystem is being protected.

The Council has a responsibility to consider the long-term health of marine resources, not simply administer catch limits and accommodate existing fishing practices.

These massive industrial vessels and their enormous nets should not be permitted to operate without meaningful limits in our most sensitive coastal fishing grounds. We must protect forage fish, demand independent accountability, and stop repeating the mistakes that damaged our historic fisheries.

I urge the New England Fishery Management Council to take a clear position, pursue the appropriate management actions within its authority, and work with the responsible federal agencies to secure meaningful protection for our marine ecosystem.

Our fisheries belong to the public, and their future must take priority over the short-term interests of industrial extraction.

Sincerely,

Tyler McLaughlin

From: Eugenio PineiroSoler - NOAA Federal <eugenio.e.pineirosoler@noaa.gov>
Sent: Friday, October 30, 2026 9:10 AM
To: Eugenio PineiroSoler - NOAA Federal <eugenio.e.pineirosoler@noaa.gov>
Subject: NOAA Fisheries Releases 3 Flagship Reports: 2025 Status of Stocks, 2024 Fisheries of the United States, and 2024 Fisheries Economics of the United States

All,

Today, NOAA Fisheries released three of the agency's flagship reports—*2025 Status of Stocks, 2024 Fisheries of the United States,* and *2024 Fisheries Economics of the United States*. These annual reports cover different aspects of the status of U.S. marine fisheries, including data trends over time.

The ***2025 Status of Stocks Annual Report to Congress on the Status of U.S. Fisheries*** shows positive trends: the number of stocks on the overfishing list decreased to an all-time low of 15 and another stock was added to the rebuilt list for a total of 52 rebuilt stocks since 2000.

- The subject to overfishing list dropped from 23 stocks to 15. Of the 372 stocks with a known overfishing status, 96 percent are *not subject to overfishing*.
- The number of stocks on the overfished list remained the same at 42 stocks. Of the 265 stocks with a known overfished status, 84 percent are *not overfished*.
- Notably, Atlantic blue marlin was removed from the overfishing list for the first time since 1998 and quillback rockfish (California) was added to the rebuilt list in 2025.

Managing fisheries sustainably is an adaptive process that relies on sound science, innovative management approaches, effective enforcement, meaningful partnerships, and robust public participation. Partnerships with the regional fishery management councils, state and international partners, and interstate fisheries commissions are also key to the success of ending overfishing and rebuilding stocks.

The ***2024 Fisheries of the United States*** *and* ***2024 Fisheries Economics of the United States*** reports provide a snapshot of fisheries statistics and the economic performance of commercial fisheries, recreational fisheries, and other marine-related sectors. Key 2024 takeaways include:

- U.S. commercial fishing, seafood, and recreational fishing supported 1.7 million jobs and generated $321 billion in sales impacts.
- Commercial fishery landings totaled 7.7 billion pounds generating $4.9 billion in revenue.
- Commercial fisheries and the seafood industry supported 1 million jobs and generated $175 billion in sales impacts.

- Recreational fishing generated $146 billion in sales impacts, supported 685,000 jobs, and contributed $78.9 billion in value-added impacts nationwide.
- Aquaculture is poised as a key driver to increase American seafood competitiveness, with 561 million pounds of farmed seafood valued at $1.3 billion. It is roughly 20 percent of U.S. seafood by value.

The data in these reports inform the Administration's goal of restoring American seafood competitiveness and support NOAA's efforts to promote domestic seafood production and address unfair trade practices. In 2024, U.S. per capita seafood consumption was 18.4 pounds, and the United States imported $25 billion in edible seafood products and exported $4.4 billion.

The reports will be available at NOAA Fisheries' website, and the full datasets will be available in the Fisheries One Stop Shop.

Please let us know if you would like any additional information or have any questions.

Thanks,

Genio

From: NOAA Fisheries <noaafisheries@public.govdelivery.com>
Sent: Thursday, November 5, 2026 12:56 PM
To: Cate O'Keefe <cokeefe@nefmc.org>
Subject: NOAA Fisheries' Recreational Fishing Data Partnership Updates - Fall 2026

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NOAA FISHERIES

NEWSCAST

Fall 2026

Recreational Fishing Data Partnership Roundup



Recreational Angler Partnership Improvement Directive

Where is the RAPID Process Now?

The Recreational Angler Partnership Improvement Directive (RAPID), the collaborative process to remodel recreational fisheries data collection, is in its workshop planning phase. Eight regional workshops will be held in early 2027 and cover all fishery management council regions. To tailor the workshop approach to specific regional priorities and needs, RAPID planning teams composed of state, regional, and federal partners are guiding the process. These teams are currently selecting participants and

workshop locations and shaping the workshop agendas. Collectively, workshop discussions will inform a redesigned framework for recreational fisheries data collection that provides the regional flexibility to maintain (with improvements), supplement (new data), or replace (new surveys) existing systems while preserving nationally cohesive elements. In addition to technical discussions about data collection and assessment, regional workshop participants will discuss improvements to agency partnership governance and data standards.

Tentative Workshop Schedule

- **National Angler Listening Sessions (virtual)*:**
    - Dec. 3, 2026, from 5 to 7 p.m. ET
    - Dec. 9, 2026, from 8 to 10 p.m. ET

- **Mid-Atlantic:** Jan. 5–7, 2027, in Philadelphia
- **South Atlantic:** Jan. 11–13, 2027, in Charleston
- **New England:** Jan. 20–22, 2027, in Boston
- **West Coast:** Feb. 2–4, 2027, in Portland or San Diego
- **Caribbean**: Feb. 8–9, 2027, in Puerto Rico
- **Gulf of America:** March 1–3, 2027, in New Orleans
- *To Be Scheduled: North Pacific and Western Pacific*

*National angler listening sessions will provide pre-workshop background on RAPID and offer a space for comments, feedback, and questions. More information coming soon.

Opportunities for Public Engagement

RAPID allows interested parties to help guide the modernization of recreational fisheries data collection. The more participation we have throughout this process, the more closely the resulting framework will match the unique fisheries data needs in your region. Verbal and written public comments will be collected throughout the process, including during the workshops (both in-person and online), and will be documented in the regional workshop summaries. There are several opportunities for the public to get involved, and we request partners amplify these opportunities:

- **National Angler Listening Sessions:** Key angler takeaways from these sessions will be incorporated into the regional workshop discussions. We want to know: What aspects of the current system are working well, and what is not working? How can we strengthen trust and partnership with anglers, charters, and fishing groups?
- **Attendance at a Regional Workshop Online:** Plenary sessions will be livestreamed during workshops.

- **Attendance at a Regional Workshop in Person:** Limited seating will be available for interested members of the public to observe workshop discussions and provide public comment.
- **National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Summit (March 23-24, 2027, in Alexandria, VA):** RAPID is a key agenda item at the Rec Summit, and there will be opportunities for angler-focused discussions during this public event.

Planning Team Takeaways

- There is no one-size-fits-all approach to recreational fisheries data collection. We need to accommodate varying baselines, recognizing that regions are at different stages of development — from established programs seeking enhancements, to newer initiatives just getting off the ground, to regions interested in designing entirely new systems.
- NOAA and partner agencies are committed to meaningfully engaging the recreational and non-commercial fishing community, including private anglers and charter captains and guides, to ensure those who contribute fisheries data have a voice in RAPID.
- There is a strong interest in the cross-regional sharing of recreational data collection insights and approaches. The RAPID steering committee and planning teams are including cross-regional perspectives in planning discussions and workshop agendas.

Upcoming Presentations

- **Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission:** Nov. 9-12, 2026, Newport, Rhode Island
- **Pacific Fishery Management Council:** Nov. 13-18, 2026, Garden Grove, California
- **South Atlantic Fishery Management Council:** Dec. 7-11, 2026, Beaufort, North Carolina

We always welcome feedback on RAPID. Please share your ideas and questions with Tim Sartwell (tim.sartwell@noaa.gov) or Anna Mehlhorn (anna.mehlhorn@noaa.gov).



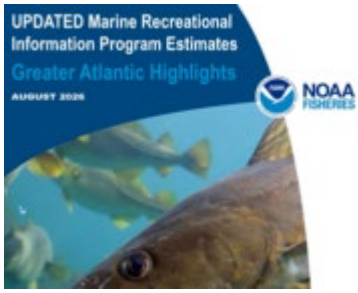
The Administration's **Executive Order RESTORING AMERICAN SALTWATER ANGLING AND RECREATION** was announced Sept. 17.

RAPID and the E.O. are closely linked. While not specifically named in the E.O., RAPID, as currently designed, serves as the catalyst to

achieve the recreational fishing data improvement goals outlined in the E.O. We do not anticipate major changes to the approach.

Right now, NOAA Fisheries is focused on identifying expert leads to address the E.O.'s various goals. Together, RAPID and the E.O. will result in an improved recreational data collection system founded in partnership and collaboration.

NOAA anticipates the opportunity for broad discussion of the E.O. directives during the RAPID regional workshops. We welcome your continued feedback and strive to keep you all informed as we work to implement the directives of this E.O. to ensure a long-lasting, positive impact for our recreational fishing community.



National Survey Updates

Fishing Effort Survey

NOAA Fisheries has published updated recreational fishing effort and catch estimates dating back to 1981, reflecting the improved 2026 Fishing Effort Survey (FES) design.

NEW Regional Highlights Handouts

These handouts outline the key takeaways and regional management implications stemming from this update.

- Greater Atlantic Regional Highlight
- Southeast Regional Highlight
- Hawaii Regional Highlight

2026 Preliminary Estimates and Back-Calibrated Estimates Now Available

We published the 2026 preliminary estimates through June based on the improved FES on Nov. 5. Additional 2026 data will be released by 2-month wave as soon as available. Because the new FES scales estimates lower than the original FES, the 2026 estimates are not directly comparable to existing Annual Catch Limits set using previous data. Therefore, in conjunction with the release of the 2026 preliminary estimates on Nov. 5, we also published these estimates back-calibrated to the original FES design for interim management use.

NOAA Fisheries Releases 3 Flagship Reports



NOAA Fisheries has released three of the agency's flagship reports—*2025 Status of Stocks*, *2024 Fisheries of the United States,* and *2024 Fisheries Economics of the United States*. These annual reports cover different aspects of the status of U.S. marine fisheries, including data trends over time.

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Atlantic Coast Updates

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission Publishes a Guide to Fisheries Science & Stock Assessments

"Management of coastal and marine resources is a complex process that balances what we know about the fish populations we are managing (like the size of a fish population, its habitat, and the food it relies on, and the factors that affect its growth, reproduction, and life span) and the people that use the resources. The tricky part is we can't easily count how many fish are in a population, so we have to use stock assessments to calculate these numbers. That's why we created this guide to show you what goes into a stock assessment, from what types of information are collected to how various models work to how the assessment results are considered for management."

View the storymap here.

NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office Produces First Year-End Assessment of Fishery Catch Utilization

Beginning in 2026, GARFO will be producing a year-end assessment of fishery catch utilization for the prior fishing year. The 2025 fishing year and an archived report for the 2024 fishing year are now available. GARFO is providing this information to share and track the utilization of commercial fishery quotas, recreational fishery catch, and overall catch utilization for managed fisheries in the Greater Atlantic Region. The list of species is focused on active fisheries managed by the Mid-Atlantic and New England fishery management councils.

Mackerel on the Move: Cooperative Research Investigates Atlantic Mackerel Abundance Under Changing Ocean Conditions

After decades of declining Atlantic mackerel abundance, commercial and recreational fishermen throughout the Northeast began reporting an uptick over the past few years. Fishermen have also observed other target species like white marlin, billfish, sand lance, and *Illex* squid in surprisingly high numbers. At the same time, Atlantic mackerel, striped bass, red drum, bluefish, and other species are appearing in unexpected places and at unusual times.

Fishermen are essential partners in helping understand shifting oceanic conditions.

How fishermen can contribute on-the-water observations

NOAA Fisheries recently launched a $2.3 million cooperative research initiative that will engage more than 50 fishing vessels to improve our understanding of the Atlantic mackerel stock. Fishermen will work alongside researchers to:

- Develop new survey tools and technologies that improve estimates of stock abundance
- Quantify mackerel movement between Northeastern U.S. and Canadian waters
- Evaluate mackerel spawning seasonality
- Collect and analyze data to reduce uncertainty in future stock assessments

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Southeast Updates



Gulf Fishery Management: Progress Through Partnership

In the Gulf region, federal and state managers have collaborated for decades to sustain fisheries, innovate data collection, and support coastal communities for the future. View the story here.

Efforts to Reduce Release Mortality

This South Atlantic Fishery Management Council article explores the Council's efforts to reduce release mortality – from management measures and scientific research to the grassroots Best Fishing Practices campaign. Discover how Council staff, fishermen, scientists, and trusted fishing community ambassadors are working together to improve the survival of released fish and promote sustainable fishing practices throughout the South Atlantic. View the story here.

Remembering Dewey Hemilright

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council mourns the loss of Council member Francis "Dewey" Hemilright, a longstanding commercial fisherman, passionate advocate for his industry, and dedicated steward of our region's fisheries. Dewey passed away on Friday, October 2, 2026, leaving behind a lasting legacy in fisheries management and an immeasurable impact on the people fortunate enough to know him. View the story here.

Submit Nominations for the Atlantic Highly Migratory Species SEDAR Pool

NOAA Fisheries is soliciting nominations for the Atlantic Highly Migratory Species SouthEast Data, Assessment, and Review Workshops Advisory Panel—also known as the SEDAR Pool. Selected members will serve a 5-year term beginning in 2027. Nominations are due by Dec. 10, 2026. View more information here.

West Coast Updates

Fishing App Engages Recreational Anglers in the Scientific Process

To recreational anglers, fishing is serious business. At NOAA Fisheries Southwest Fisheries Science Center, Dr. Melissa Monk works with the recreational fleet to collect data needed to fill key gaps in stock assessments. Dr. Monk, a stock assessment scientist, works on data and models to determine how many fish we can sustainably harvest. View the story here.

State Survey Sampler Spotlight



Meet Sami Kurchena and Mylee Bartz, Access Point Angler Intercept Survey interviewers with the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries

APAIS is one of NOAA Fisheries' recreational fishing surveys. It gathers catch-per-trip information from anglers as they complete their fishing trips. The survey is conducted by specially trained state survey samplers at marinas, boat ramps, beaches, piers, and other public fishing access sites.

- **Time as an APAIS interviewer**
  - Sami has been an APAIS survey interviewer since 2022
  - Mylee has been an APAIS survey interviewer since 2025

- **Educational background**

- Sami has a bachelor's degree in Conservation Biology and a bachelor's degree in Biology, as well as a master's degree in Communications and Leadership from Thiel College
- Mylee has a bachelor's degree in Marine Biology from the University of North Carolina

- **Favorite fishing activity and why**
  - Sami loves to fish with her dad on a headboat or pier and compete in mini tournaments to see who can catch the biggest and most fish
  - Mylee likes the hands-on experience of being with a crew on headboats, going offshore, and helping anglers unhook their catch

- **What I like most about my job**
  - "I've always wanted to work with the public and scientists. I love to talk to tourists who are used to fishing in landlocked states. I get to help build the next generation of conservation biologists." - Sami
  - "Each day is different from the next. I get to meet families from all over the country and work at different sites at different times." - Mylee



In the News

- NOAA announces priorities to promote science-based American seafood dominance
- Do You Know the Heaviest Fish Ever Caught in Your State? Most Anglers Have No Idea
- How Scup Came Back: NOAA Explains One of the Northeast's Remarkable Fishery Recoveries
- NOAA Fisheries updates catch estimates

Upcoming Key Meetings

- Note: these are meetings with anticipated MRIP engagement in addition to the RAPID presentations outlined above.
- **Nov. 9-12, 2026** - Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission Annual Meeting and ACCSP Meeting, Newport, Rhode Island
- **Dec. 8, 2026** - South Atlantic Council Meeting, Beaufort, North Carolina
- **Dec. 14-17, 2026** - Mid-Atlantic Council Meeting, Annapolis, Maryland
- **Jan. 11-15, 2027** - Marine Resource Education Program Greater Atlantic, Falmouth, Massachusettes
- **Feb. 1-5, 2027** - Marine Resource Education Program Southeast, Charleston, South Carolina
- **March 23-24, 2027** - National Recreational Fisheries Summit, Alexandria, Virginia

Key Resources

- MRIP Outreach and Education Materials
- Fishing Effort Survey Research and Improvements
- MRIP Data User Handbook
- MRIP Survey Design and Statistical Methods Manual
- Info and Q&As on the Estimate Review Process
- MRIP Data Query Tool (access to the recreational fishing microdata and estimates)
- MRIP Data Updates Email Subscription

- Recreational Fishing Data Glossary
- Public Fishing Access Site Register
- National Saltwater Angler Registry
- **Annual Survey Reports (2025 Reports Now Live!)**
- NOAA Fisheries Survey and Data Standards
- Transitioning to New or Improved Survey Designs

About the Recreational Fishing Data Collection Partnership

This state-regional-federal partnership is responsible for developing, implementing, and improving surveys that measure how many trips saltwater anglers take and how many fish they catch. Combined with information from commercial, biological, and observer data, this recreational fishing data informs stock assessments and management decisions that aim to achieve sustainable fisheries for future generations.

Do you have a question about recreational fishing data collection or estimation? Email fisheries.mrip@noaa.gov or visit our Recreational Fishing Data web page.