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NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL ENDORSES ADMINISTRATION'S PROPOSAL FOR UNIVERSAL SALTWATER ANGLER REGISTRATION

The National Research Council, an arm of the National Academy of Sciences, has presented NOAA with preliminary findings of a study to improve the agency's scientific program for recreational marine fisheries. NRC's primary recommendation supports the Administration's call for a universal angler registration program as part of a comprehensive data collection system, included in the reauthorization bill for the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act currently under consideration in Congress.

NOAA commissioned the NRC study in 2004 to gain unbiased scientific insight into ways the agency can strengthen its recreational fishing data collection program to meet the modern needs of fisheries managers. NRC presented the results yesterday at a meeting in Arlington, Va., to NOAA Fisheries Service leadership, the directors of the state fisheries management agencies, and recreational fishing industry leaders.

"NRC has provided us with guidance on the way forward with our recreational data collection program," said Bill Hogarth, director of NOAA's Fisheries Service. "The study underpins the Bush Administration's call for a comprehensive angler registration program, and I look forward to working in partnership with Congress, the states, and recreational fishermen to make sure it becomes a reality."

In response to angler concerns about how recreational data is used for fishery management decisions, Hogarth tasked NRC to review current scientific methodologies for data collection, recommend improvements, and identify potential new data collection methods. NRC calls a national registration of all saltwater anglers "the most effective way to achieve a comprehensive, universal sampling frame with national coverage" of recreational fishing data.

Representatives from NRC told NOAA that the current method of capturing recreational data – NOAA's Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistical Survey (MRFSS) – is handicapped by a number of issues, including a small staff, lack of a universal sampling for all saltwater anglers, lack of uniform participation in data collection efforts by all the states, and modest funding to run the data collection program.

The MRFSS program, launched in 1979, has been modified and updated over the years. However, NRC concluded that management goals and fishing practices have evolved over time, which calls for a revised fisheries data collection design and new analysis methods. NRC also called for better communication and outreach to the recreational fishing community about the need for accurate recreational fisheries data and standardization among state surveys, and between state surveys and the central MRFSS program.

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“We are going to need the cooperation and partnership of all the states to implement the changes recommended yesterday by NRC,” Hogarth said. “You have my commitment to improve the system. It’s time we all roll up our sleeves and fix the MRFSS program so we can all be confident in the data we use to manage recreational fisheries.”

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation’s living marine resources and their habitats through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service 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, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, 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. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners and 60 countries to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes.

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On the Web:

NOAA Fisheries Service: www.nmfs.noaa.gov

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