


M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Council, AP and SSC Members

FROM: Clarence G. Pautzke 
Executive Director

DATE: January 8, 1990

SUBJECT: NMFS Marine Recreational Fisheries Action Plan

ACTION REQUIRED

Review and comment as appropriate on recreational fisheries plan.

BACKGROUND

Item C-4(a) is the NMFS Marine Recreational Fisheries Action Plan. It contains the following policy statement:

"NMFS, through its various programs, will protect, conserve, enhance, manage and develop fishery resources of importance to the nation in order to increase the nation's food supply, promote increased opportunities for both commercial and marine recreational fishermen consistent with the concept of optimum yield; and promote activities which will assist the commercial and marine recreational fishing industries to thrive and expand."

There are eight Guiding Principles:

1. Marine recreational fisheries program must address all three components of recreational fisheries: the resource, users, and industry.
2. Marine Recreational fisheries contribute significant social and economic benefits to the nation.
3. Robust marine fishery resources are requisites for viable marine recreational fisheries.
4. Accurate and timely information is crucial to the conservation, management, and development of marine recreational fisheries.
5. Marine fishery resources are a national asset, which, through wise management, can be enhanced and improved for future generations.
6. Multiple uses of marine fishery resources are recognized and encouraged.

7. Authorities, roles, and responsibilities of government and private entities in the conservation and development of marine recreational fisheries are recognized.
8. Conserving and developing marine recreational fisheries is (sic) a shared responsibility.

The action plan has five major goals:

1. Conserve, restore, enhance fishery resources and the habitat on which they depend, recognizing that, if properly conserved and managed, fishery resources can provide substantial economic, social, and aesthetic benefits to the nation.
2. Conserve and restore habitats critical to the well-being of recreationally important species and supporting ecosystems.
3. To improve NMFS's research, data acquisition, data management, analysis, and dissemination capabilities needed to provide the scientific and management basis for conservation of marine recreational fishery resources.
4. Expand NMFS' ability to effectively and appropriately interact with and enhance the marine recreational fishing industry.
5. Provide positive support for marine recreational fisheries through effective implementation of the marine recreational fisheries action plan.

And, finally, to improve planning and coordination, a National Marine Recreational Fisheries Steering Committee will be established, composed of fishery managers from the states, Councils, Commissions, federal and private sectors.

**National Oceanic and Atmospheric
Administration**

[Docket No. 90776-9176]

**Marine Recreational Fisheries Action
Plan**

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries
Service (NMFS), NOAA, Commerce.

ACTION: Notice of a draft Marine Recreational Fisheries Action Plan and request for comments.

SUMMARY: In recognition of the growing importance of marine recreational fisheries (MRF), NMFS adopted an MRF policy and implementation strategy in 1981. NMFS recently prepared a draft MRF Action Plan to focus on current MRF issues. To allow the public a chance to review NMFS' marine recreational fisheries policy and proposed activities, the draft MRF Action Plan is being published to restate NMFS' MRF policy, establish program goals and objectives, and identify specific actions that, depending upon support and availability of funds, may be used to update and improve implementation of the MRF policy. Comments are being requested from the public.

DATE: Comments from the public are invited through December 29, 1989.

ADDRESS: Additional copies of NMFS' draft MRF Action Plan can be obtained from Richard B. Stone, NMFS, Fishery Management Specialist, 1335 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Richard B. Stone or Alan Dean Parsons, 301-427-2347.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: In 1981 NMFS adopted a marine recreational fisheries policy. This policy was not implemented consistently throughout the nation as each region, as well as headquarters, proceeded to implement the policy at its own discretion based on the differing perspectives, needs, and priorities of the various geographic areas. NMFS has reformulated its implementation strategy in the form of a draft MRF Action Plan. It is intended to achieve more consistent attention to national priorities while maintaining sufficient flexibility to tailor regional programs to local needs. The purposes of the plan are to restate and update NMFS' MRF policy, establish program goals and objectives, and identify specific actions to be taken to the extent that support and funding are available that could improve the implementation of the policy.

To allow the public an opportunity for review and comment, the draft MRF Action Plan is as follows:

National Marine Fisheries Service
Marine Recreational Fisheries Action Plan

I. Introduction

Marine recreational fishing (MRF) continues to grow in popularity, not only as a highly regarded form of recreation but also as a means of obtaining high

protein food. According to a 1985 Gallup Poll, recreational fishing is the second most popular outdoor recreational activity in America, and as such, contributes nearly \$30 billion to the Nation's economy. Since 1980, the value of marine recreational fishing has grown from \$7.5 billion to \$13.5 billion (including multiplier impacts) in 1985. The number of saltwater fishermen has increased from about 5 million in 1955 to 17 million in 1985, but has not increased substantially since then.

In recognition of the growing importance of MRF, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) adopted a marine recreational fisheries policy and implementation strategy in 1981. Each Region, as well as headquarters, proceeded to implement the policy at its own discretion based on the differing perspectives, needs, and priorities of the various geographic areas. Thus, the policy was not implemented consistently or with the same degree of intensity throughout the Nation.

Recently, the NMFS, in partnership with other Federal agencies, state, and tribal governments, and representatives from private constituency groups and industry, participated in the development of a National Recreational Fisheries Policy. Actions to implement the goals and objectives of the NMFS Action Plan are consistent with those set forth by the National Policy.

The MRF industry and constituency have matured over the last several years, becoming better organized nationally, more involved in fishery issues, and increasingly committed to making fisheries conservation their primary concern. As a result, it is timely for NMFS to reformulate its implementation strategy to achieve more consistent attention to national priorities while maintaining sufficient flexibility to tailor regional programs to local needs. This approach is essential for effective interaction with MRF interests and for consistent treatment of priority MRF issues and problems.

Perhaps of greatest concern is the need for healthy fisheries resources. The primary role of Federal and state fishery managers and the Regional Fishery Management Councils is to provide stewardship of the Nation's fisheries resources. NMFS and the constituency have mutually stressed that a stronger conservation ethic, endorsed by the public as well as the government, is necessary to protect fishery resources and the habitats upon which they are dependent. Fisheries and their habitats must be recognized as national assets that, if effectively conserved and managed, can generate enormous

economic, social, and aesthetic benefits indefinitely.

The purpose of this document is to identify ways for NMFS to help improve stewardship of marine fisheries resources overall, and to better serve MRF constituencies. However, it is recognized that development of an MRF Action Plan will not by itself necessarily result in progress. A strong commitment to pursue aggressively plan implementation for the long-term as well as the short-term is essential. There must be identifiable and measurable activities to provide accountability and to allow constituent and program partners (states, commissions, councils, etc.) to monitor and participate in program activities. Accordingly, this action plan restates NMFS' MRF policy, provides guiding principles for policy implementation, establishes NMFS' MRF program goals and objectives, and identifies specific actions to update and improve implementation of the MRF policy.

II. Restatement of Policy and Guiding Principles

A. Policy Statement. The following policy was adopted by NMFS in 1981 after an extensive review of NMFS MRF activities by a marine recreational fisheries task group.

"NMFS, through its various programs, will protect, conserve, enhance, manage and develop fishery resources of importance to the nation in order to increase the nation's food supply; promote increased opportunities for both commercial and marine recreational fishermen consistent with the concept of optimum yield; and promote activities which will assist the commercial and marine recreational fishing industries to thrive and expand."

B. Guiding Principles. The following guiding principles advance fundamental beliefs and strategies that further clarify NMFS' marine recreational fisheries policy and that guide policy implementation efforts.

1. *Marine Recreational Fisheries Program must Address All Three Components of Recreational Fisheries: the Resource, Users, and Industry.* First, with respect to the resources, MRF refers to one or more stocks of fish which can be treated as a unit for purposes of conservation, management, utilization, or development and which can be identified on the basis of geographical, scientific, technical, economic, or method-of-harvest characteristics. The term "fish" includes finfish, mollusks, crustaceans, and all forms of living marine animals which form the resource base for recreational

fishing. Enhancing and maintaining these stocks requires the enhancement and maintenance of water quality and the habitats on which the stocks depend and control of the harvest/catch.

Second, with respect to the user. MRF refers to individuals engaging in marine recreational fishing activity. Fishing is considered recreational when pleasure, amusement, relaxation or home consumption are the principal motivators. The program must result in an improved understanding of fishermen's needs and the impact of management decisions upon them.

Third, MRF refers to the MRF industry. Interest and participation in marine recreational fishing creates a demand for a wide variety of goods and services that enable fishermen to participate in recreational fishing activities. The private businesses which provide these goods and services are collectively referred to as the MRF industry. These businesses employ thousands of Americans, account for sizeable capital expenditures, and contribute substantially to the Nation's gross national product and overall economic well being. The program should consider how management decisions affect the industry.

2. Marine Recreational Fisheries Contribute Significant Social and Economic Benefits to the Nation. Marine recreational fishing is an increasingly popular outdoor recreational activity that contributes substantially to the social and economic well being of the Nation. Millions of individuals and families participate annually in marine recreational fishing as a relaxing, healthful, wholesome source of recreation and as a way of obtaining high quality protein food. Collectively, the MRF industry translates this recreation activity into a multi-billion dollar contribution to the Nation's economy.

3. Robust Marine Fishery Resources are Requisites for Viable Marine Recreational Fisheries. Marine fisheries are dependent on the maintenance, restoration, and enhancement of marine fish populations and their habitats. NMFS' principal function is to serve as steward of those resources and habitats. Conservation and enhancement of marine fishery resources shall be accomplished through scientific management intended to achieve optimum yield from each fishery.

4. Accurate and Timely Information is Crucial to the Conservation, Management, and Development of Marine Recreational Fisheries. NMFS has an important role in conducting, sponsoring, and otherwise encouraging scientific, statistical, and socioeconomic

research and related investigations which provide the basis for conservation and management of marine resources.

5. Marine Fishery Resources are a National Asset, Which, Through Wise Management, Can be Enhanced and Improved for Future Generations. NMFS is committed to the mission of rebuilding and conserving marine fishery resources while allowing equitable sharing of those resources among recreational, commercial, and non-consumptive users, such as SCUBA divers, observation boats, etc. NMFS recognizes the biological necessity of regulating total catch within the limits of optimum yield. Accomplishing this management mission requires effective, cooperative partnerships with other Federal agencies, the states, Regional Fishery Management Councils, Interstate Commissions, and public and private sector interests. NMFS also recognizes the need to pursue aggressively international agreements for the conservation of highly migratory oceanic species of fish and to secure access for U.S. fishermen to fishery resources in international waters.

6. Multiple Uses of Marine Fishery Resources are Recognized and Encouraged. NMFS recognizes the national benefits resulting from multiple use of marine fishery resources by recreational, commercial, and subsistence fishermen as well as by non-consumptive users. NMFS also supports existing jurisdictional relationships between state and Federal Government resource stewards and the public as appropriate forums for rendering fishery allocation decisions affecting competing resource users.

7. Authorities, Roles, and Responsibilities of Government and Private Entities in the Conservation and Development of Marine Recreational Fisheries are Recognized. NMFS will engage in those activities that are the responsibility of Federal Government and will encourage and assist other Federal, state, and local government agencies, the academic community, private interests, and the public to cooperate and participate in its programs. NMFS will encourage other entities to assume responsibility for MRF programs and services more appropriately theirs, recognizing unified and cooperative partnerships as a goal.

8. Conserving and Developing Marine Recreational Fisheries is a Shared Responsibility. As major users and beneficiaries of marine fishery resources, fishermen and the industry must accept their stewardship roles and responsibilities and do their part in funding, promoting, and supporting essential marine fisheries research, data

collection, management, development and law enforcement efforts; Angling ethics, resource conservation, and aquatic education should be promoted and practiced through effective government/private partnerships.

III. Action Plan

The action plan consists of five major sections, each with goals, objectives, and action steps. Consistent and aggressive implementation should enhance NMFS' resource stewardship capabilities. The primary thrust of the Action Plan is best expressed by the first goal. NMFS will focus its major effort on the conservation of fisheries and their habitat, in recognition of the significant benefits the marine resources provide to the nation. Only with the resource on a sound footing can the recreational program be fully successful.

A. Conservation of Resources

Goal: Conserve, restore, and enhance fishery resources and the habitat on which they depend, recognizing that, if properly conserved and managed, fishery resources can provide substantial economic, social, and aesthetic benefits to the Nation.

A conservation approach needs to be emphasized in resource management as a means to restore and maintain healthy fisheries. NMFS must assert a leadership role in accomplishing this goal, and must secure participation, cooperation, and support of the MRF constituency.

A.1 OBJECTIVE: Develop a stronger linkage between information on the status and condition of stocks and management decisions affecting recreational fisheries.

A.1a—Each Research Center should review, evaluate, and, if needed, upgrade its stock assessment capabilities to ensure that assessments for species of recreational importance or potential importance are provided.

A.1b—Distribute stock assessments, expressed in layman's terms, for key species of recreational importance, or potential importance, to increase general understanding of the status of various stocks.

A.2 OBJECTIVE: Improve fishery management procedures for MRF.

When management is necessary, encourage the use of fishery management techniques; such as bag limits, size limits, gear limitations, and other measures to control fishing mortality, that are easily monitored, while permitting continued access to the fishery. Improve MRF input and

participation in the fishery management planning process.

A.3 OBJECTIVE: Promote conservation practices among fishermen.

Implement a national angling ethics program, in cooperation with the tackle industry, state fishery management agencies, and the MRF community, emphasizing tag and release, catch and release, expanded use of non-traditional species, regulatory compliance, and other related issues.

A.4 OBJECTIVE: Expand MRF information and education (I&E) programs.

A.4a—Establish and maintain Information and Education programs on NMFS research and management activities.

A.4b—Develop closer working ties with outdoor writer associations and media to improve flow of information to fishermen.

A.4c—Establish working relationships with tournament directors and fishing clubs, to increase their awareness of NMFS resource and management programs, and to promote resource conservation and angling ethics.

A.4d—Develop or distribute primers and educational materials on seafood quality, safety issues, conservation, the proper care and handling of catch, use of non-traditional species, and other topics of interest.

A.5 OBJECTIVE: To achieve more effective public adherence to fishery regulations.

A.5a—Expand I&E efforts, including brochures on regulations, creation of "Fishery Conservation Hotline", and greater interaction with conservation editors.

A.5b—Increase State/Federal cooperative enforcement seeking cross deputization and other appropriate means.

A.5c—Encourage and assist the states and Federal Government to resolve incompatible or conflicting regulations on species of recreational interest.

A.6 OBJECTIVE: Review current conservation engineering efforts, and expand where appropriate.

A.6a—Accelerate commercial gear research, development, and modification efforts to reduce bycatch and habitat destruction.

A.6b—Document applications of artificial reef technology for enhancement of recreational fisheries.

A.6c—Increase involvement in artificial reef research planning, management, and development.

Conservation of Habitat

Goal: Conserve and restore habitats critical to the well-being of recreationally important species and supporting ecosystems.

B.1 OBJECTIVE: Identify critical habitat problems which adversely affect species of importance to MRF.

B.1a—Review actions affecting species of importance to MRF and with EPA, the states, and local governments, work to establish priorities, and recommend corrective actions for habitat protection and restoration in each Region.

B.1b—Work with other government agencies (Federal, state and local) to implement the National Estuarine Program, and other coastal initiatives.

B.2 OBJECTIVE: Increase public awareness of the impacts on fishery resources created by habitat alteration.

B.2a—Prepare regional documentaries describing fishery and habitat relationships, unique aspects on habitat, and status and trends on the protection of critical habitats.

B.2b—Evaluate plans and provide guidance to other agencies, under authority of the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act and other statutes, on policies significantly affecting fishery habitats of importance to MRF.

C. Research, Data Collection, Data Management, and Information Analysis

Goal: To improve NMFS's research, data acquisition, data management, analysis, and dissemination capabilities needed to provide the scientific and management basis for conservation of marine recreational fishery resources.

Socioeconomic and biological data important to the management of MRF are often missing or sparse, and some existing data do not receive adequate consideration in management decisions. To address this, several steps must be taken.

First, NMFS must work with fishery managers to identify data needs and implement research and statistical programs to fill these needs.

Second, NMFS must make available to fishery managers, all existing biological and socioeconomic data and ensure its appropriate use.

Third, NMFS must educate and inform marine recreational fishermen and the MRF industry about the objectives of data collection efforts and how this information is being used by resource managers.

Current research and data collection programs should be monitored and reviewed as to their ability to support fishery management and development

decisions, including stock assessments, user allocations, quota monitoring, fishery evaluation, and regulatory impact analyses. Timeliness, accuracy, precision, and comparability of data must be carefully assessed and improved when possible.

C.1 OBJECTIVE: Improve planning and coordination of NMFS' research, data collection, and analysis components.

C.1a—Establish a National MRF steering committee, composed of fishery managers from the state, Councils, Commissions, Federal, and private sectors, to identify management

questions requiring data or information. Work with Federal and state data collectors and recommend actions needed to provide more comprehensive, precise, and timely MRF data for use by state and Federal resource managers.

C.1b—Conduct annual research program reviews within each Fishery Center to evaluate ongoing research and recommend program adjustments (e.g. shifts in research emphasis, enhancements, initiatives).

C.1c—Conduct regular NMFS/Sea Grant retreats at regional/national level to identify and evaluate cooperative research projects.

C.1d—Cooperate with Sea Grant to develop specific strategies for working with Marine Advisory Services in MRF communication/education efforts.

C.1e—Establish program coordination with state Wallop-Breaux (W-3) coordinators providing technical assistance, as outlined in the NMFS/USFWS Memorandum of Understanding.

C.1f—Enhance an ongoing communication effort to advise managers and MRF constituents of research findings.

C.1g—Develop a socioeconomic research plan in each Region to support fishery management programs making sure to address MRF issues.

C.1h—Coordinate inclusion of the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS) data base into fishery management plans.

C.1i—Coordinate with other Federal, state, private, and academic institutions involved with MRF research, data collection, and analysis.

C.2 OBJECTIVE: Improve the effectiveness of MRF data collection, data management, analysis, and dissemination.

C.2a—Use state/Federal Cooperative Agreements to integrate, whenever feasible, state and Federal MRF sampling programs under agreed upon standards to create a consistent

nationwide data collection program and to eliminate duplication.

C.2b—Determine the appropriate MRFSS sample size nationwide and conduct rare event (e.g., billfish) species surveys as appropriate to improve data used in Federal fishery management decisions.

C.2c—Improve the application of socioeconomic information to support regional research plans developed under *C.1g*.

C.2d—Publish and distribute validations of MRF data collection methodologies and data bases to ensure applicability, accessibility, and familiarity.

C.2e—Conduct regular seminars and use other forums to inform fishery managers, constituents, the general public, industry, and others of the results, proper use, and limitations of economic and statistical data collection and analysis programs.

C.2f—Improve NMFS' analytical capability to interpret and evaluate MRF statistical data and ensure appropriate and timely use of data.

C.2g—Regionally, produce and distribute annual summaries, trends, and forecasts of species important to MRF in a timely fashion.

D. Industry Services

Goal: Expand NMFS' ability to interact effectively and appropriately with and enhance the MRF industry.

The MRF industry is an integral and significant part of the total U.S. fishing industry. It encompasses a broad range of individual businesses that provide a variety of goods and services to marine recreational fishermen both domestic and foreign. NMFS needs to assist the industry within the scope and authority of NMFS' programs.

D.1. OBJECTIVE: Increase understanding of the nature and operation of the MRF industry.

D.1a—Develop industry profiles including information on various business sectors, size, composition, and operation of charter/headboat fleets, cost and return analysis, entry and exit of businesses/vessels, and other aspects.

D.1b—Coordinate with state and other governmental agencies and industries to encourage recreational fisheries tourism.

D.1c—Develop capability to interpret and evaluate MRF industry information, including monitoring industry response to management decisions.

D.2. OBJECTIVE: Assist the industry to undertake appropriate research and development activities.

D.2a—Help the MRF industry gain access to funding sources (e.g., S-K, MARFIN, Sea Grant, etc.) for research and development projects.

D.2b—Identify and reduce trade barriers affecting the MRF's competitive position of U.S. tackle manufacturers.

D.2c—Establish outreach activities to ensure industry access to vital fisheries research and statistical information.

E. Administrative Program Direction.

Goal: Provide positive support for marine recreational fisheries through effective implementation of the MRF action plan.

Previous sections followed program lines, providing goals, objectives, and actions needed to more fully implement the MRF policy. However, achievement of these goals and objectives will require a strong, long-term commitment by NMFS. This commitment must be reflected in planning and budget documents and performance plans. This section provides for these internal actions needed to ensure successful MRF policy and program implementation.

E.1. OBJECTIVE: Establish effective program planning and coordination mechanisms.

E.1a—The Washington Office and each Region will develop a detailed strategy document identifying activities, resources, and time tables needed to implement the Action Plan.

E.1b—Each Region will utilize a MRF Steering Committee to involve MRF interests in program planning.

E.1c—Use forums within regional fisheries commissions, and other state, regional, and national organizations to communicate and coordinate MRF program matters.

E.2. OBJECTIVE: Provide sufficient staffing and support to carry out the Action Plan.

E.2a—Provide staff support commensurate in size with the importance (catch, effort, socioeconomic impact) of MRF in the Regions, growth potential, and the extent of problems.

E.2b—Launch and maintain an aggressive public affairs program that includes frequent field meetings with MRF clubs, charter/headboat associations, state and interstate coordination bodies (e.g., Marine Fisheries Commissions, W-B coordinators, outdoor writers associations, etc.) and attendance at regional and national symposia.

E.3. OBJECTIVE: Establish effective mechanisms to monitor and evaluate MRF program accomplishments.

E.3a—Washington Office and Regions will use tracking or control systems to

monitor and report program progress and make program adjustments.

E.3b—The Recreational and Interjurisdictional Fisheries Division will monitor the Action Plan implementation progress and report periodically to an appropriate management level.

E.3c—Conduct a national MRF program review annually in conjunction with MRF Coordinators meeting.

Dated: November 7, 1989.

Richard H. Schaefer,

Director of Office of Fisheries Conservation and Management, National Marine Fisheries Service.

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