



PRESS RELEASE

Recreational Fishing Alliance

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For Immediate Release
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January 28, 2011
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RFA SAYS NMFS TO UPDATE CONGRESS TODAY ON ANGLER SURVEY NJ Rep. Pallone Pledges To Push For Federal Funding To Support State Registry Programs

January 28, 2011 - NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) will brief Congress today on their progress in meeting requirements under the Magnuson-Stevens Reauthorization Act of 2006 to implement an improved recreational fisheries survey. Deemed "fatally flawed" by the National Research Council in 2006, the Marine Recreational Fishing Statistical Survey (MRFSS) was to have been replaced with a new survey program as of 2009 per federal law, with a mandatory report due to Congress by the Secretary of Commerce within 24 months after establishment of the new survey program.

In their report (*Counting on the Future of Recreational Fishing*) dated January 1, 2011, the U.S. Department of Commerce and NMFS say "To meet the Magnuson-Stevens Reauthorization Act requirements, NMFS established the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP)," which they call a new way to count and report marine recreational catch and effort. According to the Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA), while NMFS claims to be on track toward fully implementing both the letter and the spirit of the law, the federal agency has not actually met the requirement to implement the survey.

"NMFS will tell Congress that there was a plan in place as of 2009, but the fact is that NMFS did not actually have the new program implemented as required," said RFA Executive Director, Jim Donofrio. "That's like telling your boss that you planned to come to work but just didn't, and that just doesn't fly."

NMFS is set to unveil the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) in 2011 to provide more detailed, timely, and scientifically sound estimates based on improvements in recreational catch and effort estimates. A key component in improving the survey program is creation of a regionally-based registry program for recreational fisheries in order to collect the name and contact information of individuals who engage in recreational fishing in federal waters or when fishing for anadromous species like striped bass or herring. NMFS interprets that requirement to include all coastal anglers who "may" encounter anadromous, leading to efforts in several coastal states to meet the federal exemption requirements. Donofrio said New Jersey is the last coastal state to address the federal registry requirement, which he says has already cost the state grant monies.

"Last summer, NMFS announced that \$2.5 million was being appropriated to support individual state efforts to improve the quality and completeness of their registry databases," Donofrio said. "While New Jersey's share of that allocation might not have been enough to pay for the full registry implementation as spelled out on Governor Christie's desk, the fact remains that New Jersey can't even apply for these types of ongoing federal grants without at least committing to the registry requirement."

New Jersey legislators have already approved angler registry legislation (A823/S1122) which would require the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to maintain a free annual saltwater registry program in order to meet the federal mandate for data collection. The legislation was sent to the governor's office for signature on January 6th, which RFA says has not yet happened. "Even though legislation passed unanimously in the Senate and by more than two-thirds majority in the Assembly, there are still individuals who are lobbying the Governor to veto this important legislation, citing a lack of available funding," Donofrio said, a charge which he calls disingenuous based in part on today's report by NMFS.

In an official letter from U.S. Representative Frank Pallone (D-NJ), the Monmouth County Congressman has urged Governor Christie to sign the angler registry legislation into law, which he explains will improve fisheries

management and allow recreational fishermen in New Jersey to have “free access to one of our state’s most popular past times.”

“NOAA has begun providing financial assistance to states that have developed saltwater registries. These federal funds are available to states to support the development of their registry and to meet the requirements of maintaining a registry that provides for better fisheries management,” Rep. Pallone said, explaining that federal funding is being provided by NMFS to help fund projects which will improve the completeness and accuracy of the states’ license and registry database content and enable the states to update their license and registry databases for submitting to NMFS and survey operators.

“The only way for any state to take advantage of this funding is by agreeing to implement a saltwater registry to capture the angler data, and that’s the straight talk that Governor Christie should have been getting from his administration,” Donofrio said. “We all realize that the DEP is not adequately funding marine fisheries in New Jersey, but each day this registry sits on the governor’s desk may actually be costing that state critical funding,” he said.

“As NOAA continues to financially and materially support the development of state registries, I am committed to working with you on attaining assistance for New Jersey,” Rep. Pallone said in his letter to the governor, while adding “I implore you to protect our recreational fishermen, the recreational fishing industry and thousands of small business along our coast by making the free saltwater fishing registry law.”

This Saturday morning, Sen. Jeff Van Drew (D-Cape May), one of the primary sponsors of New Jersey’s registry legislation will be a guest of *Rack & Fin Radio* host Tom P. on ESPN Radio out of Atlantic City beginning at 8 a.m. (97.3 FM in South Jersey; online at www.973espn.com) where he’s expected to discuss the saltwater angler registry. “State Senator Van Drew and U.S. Congressman Pallone both understand our current fiscal crisis, and thankfully they’re also each aware of our state and federal issues with bureaucracy run amok,” Donofrio said.

RFA has frequently pointed to the federal Dingell-Johnson Sport Fish Restoration Fund as a possible funding source to help pay for the angler registry in New Jersey. “Federal excise taxes paid by anglers are granted annually to states to help pay for initiatives which by law support the restoration, conservation, management and enhancement of sport fish, and that’s precisely what the national registry initiative is about,” Donofrio said.

“U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service representatives told us that the Dingell-John Sport Fish Restoration Act does not specifically state that monies cannot be used to fund an angler registration program,” Donofrio said. “What they did say is that it’s up to the Division of Fish and Wildlife to submit a proposal, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in turn would review it,” he said.

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The Recreational Fishing Alliance is a national, grassroots political action organization representing recreational fishermen and the recreational fishing industry on marine fisheries issues. RFA’s Mission is to safeguard the rights of saltwater anglers, protect marine, boat and tackle industry jobs, and ensure the long-term sustainability of our Nation’s saltwater fisheries. For more information, call 888-JOIN-RFA or visit www.joinrfa.org.