

NOAA Presents Key Findings of Recreational Fishing Effort Study



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Earlier today, NOAA Fisheries presented key findings of a pilot study we conducted to evaluate potential sources of bias in our recreational [Fishing Effort Survey](#) (FES) questionnaire design. This [pilot study](#) was conducted as part of our commitment to continuous improvement and in response to concerns expressed by the recreational fishing community. We also outlined the path forward, including additional steps the agency will take to improve our state-regional-federal recreational data collection program and strengthen our partnerships.

Findings were presented to Hill staff, affected Regional Fishery Management Council chairs and executive directors, the Interstate Marine Fisheries Commission directors, Fisheries Information Network representatives, state fisheries directors from the states participating in NOAA's Recreational FES, and recreational industry representatives.

In brief, the results we shared included:

- While the sequence of questions in the FES is based on a well-researched and standard survey practice to ask easier questions prior to more challenging questions, findings from our pilot study suggest this may not always be optimal.
- The FES asks respondents to report their fishing activity over a 2-month period and a 12-month period. In the pilot study, conducted over the course of 6 months, we changed the question order and first asked about fishing trips in the previous 12 months.
- Switching the sequence of questions resulted in fewer reporting errors and effort estimates that were generally 30 to 40 percent lower for shore and private boat modes than estimates produced from the current design. However, results varied by state and fishing mode.

Path forward:

- We are planning a larger-scale follow-up study to gain a clearer understanding of the differences in effort estimates between the current design and a revised design that changes both the question order and increases the frequency of sampling (monthly instead of every two months).
- It's important to note that we don't know if we will get the same results in this follow-up study.
- The follow-up study will be conducted over the full course of 2024 with the revised design administered alongside the current design.

- Monthly sampling will produce more frequent estimates, which is a priority of our regional partners, and a shorter respondent recall period may also minimize reporting errors.
- Lowering the reporting error rate should ultimately produce more accurate data and resulting estimates of effort.
- It's important to determine through this study the combined impacts on reporting errors of more frequent sampling with changing the order of questions.

We do not have all the answers right now regarding potential impacts to estimates or stock assessments until we've completed the follow-up study, but we are committed to working openly and transparently with our partners through our established processes.

We will continue working collaboratively with our partners on programmatic improvements to the state-regional-federal partnership for recreational data collection, including leveraging recent [Inflation Reduction Act investments](#). Longer-term, we will work to actively strengthen our interagency recreational data collection partnership through an updated program vision developed collaboratively with our key state and regional partners.

The Pilot Study report, "[Evaluating Measurement Error in the MRIP Fishing Effort Survey](#)," can also be found on our MRIP Reports [site](#) through search.

Please let me or my team know if you have any questions.

Evan

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