

**NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE (NMFS) INFORMATIONAL REPORT
ON THE 2017 WEST COAST REGIONAL RECREATIONAL FISHERIES
ROUNDTABLES**

NOAA Fisheries' West Coast Region hosted two Recreational Fisheries Roundtables as part of a series of national public discussions with saltwater recreational fishermen in the spring of 2017. These conversations were the latest in a series of Agency efforts over the last seven years to develop a strong working partnership with recreational fishermen. A similar set of meetings conducted in 2013 were well received by recreational fishing interests and bolstered mutual understanding of priorities between saltwater recreational fishermen and NOAA Fisheries.

The 2017 discussions look to build on past progress by creating new relationships and strengthening existing relationships; identifying mutual interests; highlighting regional concerns and priorities; identifying inter-regional issues; and providing NOAA Fisheries with important clarifications and insights to inform regional and national agency planning.

Roundtable Summary

This summary provides a condensed overview of the general opinions expressed by fishery stakeholders during the Long Beach, California and Newport, Oregon Roundtables. It is not a meeting transcript. Many of the topics were discussed at length.

Long Beach, California, February 8, 2017

National Marine Sanctuaries:

Participants raised concerns that Sanctuaries do not improve fisheries because the displaced effort is concentrated in the areas that remain open and that better science is needed to understand the impacts on fishing. Also, the permitting process for fishing in sanctuaries is difficult. The discussion included NMFS' role in the Sanctuary designation process and substantial interest by participants in securing a larger role for fishery management councils in the sanctuary designation process and the establishment of regulations within sanctuaries impacting fishing.

Descending Devices:

Participants noted the success of descending devices and the fundamental role played by the recreational fishing community, in partnership with the states and NOAA Fisheries, in achieving success. It was noted that the substance of conversations have shifted among fishermen from "do descending devices work" to "which device works better" to "do you have more for my friends?" Participants noted that questions remain as to whether there could be more research on descending devices and discussion of which data is incorporated in the stock assessment process.

Artificial Reefs:

Participants noted the potential benefits for artificial reefs along with frustration and concerns with the burdensome permitting process in California. Participants suggested that establishing a network of designated artificial reef zones within which permitting is pre-approved or streamlined, similar to designated artificial reef zones in the Gulf of Mexico, coupled with an interagency team to oversee the establishment of reefs in those zones could benefit the process.

Pinnipeds:

Pinnipeds are a fundamental concern for recreational fishermen because of the impacts California sea lions have on fishing vessels and activity, anadromous fishes and dock damage. In addition to novel approaches to deterrence, participants requested more science documenting and quantifying the financial impacts sea lions have on West Coast recreational fisheries. Participants questioned the need to rescue sick or injured pinnipeds from healthy populations from wildlife management, fisheries impact, and taxpayer benefit perspectives.

Access:

Participants stressed concerns that fishing access has been radically reduced. Participants voiced multiple concerns about the impact of reduced recreational fishing access which has resulted from the establishment of state and federal protected areas. These included, among others, concentration of fishing effort and subsequent depletion of target species in the remaining open areas, loss of access to fishable habitat from both areas being closed and inaccessibility of suitable open areas due to distance from access points, decreased boat sales, shifts in sales from more expensive offshore capable fishing boats to less expensive kayaks and inshore fishing vessels, and decreased participation.

Economics:

Participants expressed concerns that economic activity/contributions of recreational fishermen are not given adequate consideration in management decisions and the development of regulations. In addition, there was specific concern that economic activity of recreational fishermen from non-coastal counties is not being captured.

Communication:

The complexity and size of the Council/NOAA Fisheries documents and the frequent use of technical language are barriers to greater public participation. There was interest in the use of plain-language translations of technical materials as well as the use of graphic heavy educational materials (e.g., fish ID guides). Additionally participants suggested participation at sportfishing shows, radio shows, or open fishing organization meetings like CCA are welcomed.

Long-Term Concerns for the Future of Recreational Fisheries

Fishermen were asked to identify their single most significant concern about the long-term viability of recreational fishing. Issues identified included:

- Access
- Pinnipeds
- Adequate science for management
- Health of the ocean ecosystem
- Sustainability of the sport and overregulation of the sport
- Simplification of regulations
- Maintaining funding for stock assessments and catch estimates
- Opening/closing period for fishing
- Management needs to be based on best available science

Newport, Oregon, March 3, 2017

Access Concerns:

Participants stressed that the availability of Coho salmon and winter steelhead is inadequate to support businesses which depend on those fisheries. It was also noted by multiple participants that decreased salmon availability is driving increased bottom fishing which has become, in the view of some, the backbone supporting the tackle industry in the Northwest. Targeting of halibut and albacore is also increasing in the wake of decreased availability of salmon. Participants stressed the need to maintain fishing opportunity year-round, including through rotating seasons for different species if necessary. Safety of life at sea is more of a concern for fishermen with the shift offshore and all expressed the need to ensure anglers had adequate opportunity to get out on the water regardless of species.

Hatchery Fish:

Future reductions in hatchery production (e.g Mitchell Act funded programs) will impact recreational fishing seasons which reduces recreational fishing opportunity and economic contributions. The Hatchery and Genetic Management Plans (HGMP), required by the Endangered Species Act (ESA), are slow to be processed. Participants noted that the information required to complete HGMP is a struggle and excess litigation forces additional workload, which slows the permitting process considerably.

North of Falcon:

Participants noted that the addition of Puget Sound in the Coastal Management Plan has complicated the North of Falcon process. Participants are more willing to have some fishing rather than none and believe that creating a deadline would put more pressure on the process to arrive at an agreement. There was concern that the inability to come to an agreement -- as happened last year -- was going to happen again. Participants noted that it would be helpful if NOAA provided a harvest number rather than undefined objective.

Communication:

Better communication would enhance public participation in the management process. In particular, the complexity and size of the Council/NOAA Fisheries documents and the pervasive use of technical language are barriers to greater public participation. There was interest in the use of plain-language translations of technical materials as well as the use of graphic heavy educational materials (e.g., fish ID guides) in a variety of languages such as Spanish, Vietnamese and Chinese. Participants suggested greater placement of news and updates from NOAA Fisheries in sportfishing magazines.

Representation of Recreational Fishing Interests in the Management Process:

Participants noted satisfaction with representation in the Council process, specifically in terms of the number of seats held by recreational interests. Concern was expressed with regard to the treatment of recreational issues at the Council, specifically what was seen as the regular postponement of recreational issues to subsequent Council meetings to address other issues with “mandates” under the law. Participants stressed the importance of maintaining the “place in line” of recreational fishing topics on the Council agendas. Discussants were interested in approving research via Exempted Fishing Permits (EFP) and faster approval of EFPs on issues that could benefit recreational fisheries, such as avoiding and reducing discards. From a regulatory perspective, participants noted concerns that regulators are quick to reduce access but slow to consider loosening restrictions. Interest was expressed in having the Council front load conditions in fishery management plans/amendments triggering consideration of loosening restrictions to provide some sense that restrictions are not permanent.

Fishing Infrastructure:

Infrastructure was a concern for many in the meeting. This included maintaining and replacing existing infrastructure, such as the need to dredge harbors and harbor entrances and the difficulty in replacing docks because of habitat complications (growth of seagrass around an existing dock).

Sanctuaries and Monuments:

Many participants voiced strong concern and distrust of the national marine sanctuary and monument processes and viewed them as “adversarial.” Participants stressed the desire to have the regional councils set regulations with Sanctuaries and Monuments, not those entities themselves.

Long-Term Concerns for the Future of Recreational Fisheries

Fishermen were asked to identify their most significant concerns about the long-term viability of recreational fishing:

- There is a need to engage, educate, and involve younger recreational fishery participants in the fishery management system
- Consolidated voice/coordination among fishermen
- Crew availability (lack thereof)
- Lack of fish abundance

- Societal priority and changing demographics (e.g. decreasing youth participation in outdoor activities; loss of baby boomer participation)
- Inadequate data and science to support management
- Negative perceptions of fishing opportunity / species availability
- The unchanging nature of/slow pace of change to salmon hatchery management regulations
- Overly burdensome/ unnecessary regulations
- Inadequate notice of changing regulations
- Ocean acidification

Next Steps

NOAA Fisheries West Coast Region hopes to build off the momentum of the roundtable discussions by continuing to work directly with anglers and fisheries managers through continued implementation of the priorities and projects discussed at the roundtables and shared in the West Coast Region Recreational Fisheries Policy Implementation plan. The 2016-2017 Regional Saltwater Recreational Policy Implementation Plan seeks to improve recreational fishing opportunity and stewardship throughout west coast states and is available here. <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/management/recreational/documents/west-coast-imp-plan.pdf>