

# American Sportfishing Association 2009 Summit

Rancho Bernardo Inn, San Diego, CA

October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2009

The Honorable Dr. Jane Lubchenco, Under Secretary of  
Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere

Prepared for Delivery

---

- Thanks, Mike, and thanks to ASA for the invitation to speak today. It's a pleasure to be here.
- I want to start by making one thing very clear: **Recreational fishing is important to me and it is important to NOAA.**
- The 12 million anglers in the United States generate at least \$82 billion in sales and support over a half million jobs. As Mike Nussman likes to remind me: although recreational

fishing accounts for only 3 percent of the total saltwater fish harvest, it generates 25% of the jobs related to saltwater fisheries.

- Although these figures are impressive, anyone who fishes knows that this activity is about more than dollars and cents. For millions of people, fishing is about spending quality time with family and friends. Fishing helps people connect with each other, with the natural world, and with their children and grandchildren.
- I understand this connection, and I believe that recreational fishing is and should remain one of the nation's greatest pastimes.
- I have fond childhood memories of trout fishing with my father in Colorado mountain lakes and streams, and salmon

fishing with him on charter boats in Oregon and Washington. Those were special times, indeed, not because we were very skilled, but because we were together, sharing something we loved.

- In recent years, I have greatly enjoyed catch-and-release fishing with friends —for bonefish in Cuba and stripers in Maine. As a result of these experiences, I understand the strong attraction of recreational fishing. As NOAA's Administrator, I am committed to adopting policies that will ensure that current and future generations have the opportunity to enjoy this wonderful activity.
- This afternoon, I'd like to take this opportunity to address a few matters that I understand are of interest to you.

- Specifically, I will describe the concerns I've heard from your community and the steps that I have taken to respond to them. Next, I will discuss two specific topics: improving the collection of reliable data on recreational fishing and catch shares. I will then conclude by highlighting the Obama Administration's ongoing efforts to create a vibrant and effective set of policies for managing our ocean resources.

### ***IMPROVING ENGAGEMENT WITH THE RECREATIONAL FISHING COMMUNITY***

- Shortly after becoming NOAA's Administrator, it became obvious to me that although NOAA and recreational anglers should be allies in ensuring that we have healthy oceans and lots of fish, we were frequently at odds.
- Following a number of conversations with members of the recreational fishing community, including Mike Nussman

and Bob Hayes, I concluded that we actually have much in common, but that we have not always communicated effectively about the areas of agreement and disagreement, and we have not worked collaboratively to find solutions.

- As a result of these conversations, I decided to take concrete steps to begin to make meaningful changes. In the next few minutes, I'll tell you the initial changes that respond to your concerns. Last month I issued a policy statement on recreational fishing to set the stage for more and better conversations with you.
- To make sure that this initiative has staying power, I created a new position of senior policy advisor for recreational fishing. This is one of the few new positions I've created at NOAA. This is a signal to you that I'm paying attention, and that recreational fishing is a priority for me.

- This individual will report directly to the Assistant Administrator for NOAA Fisheries and is responsible for making sure that I am hearing your concerns and that you have a direct pipeline to weigh in on issues of importance to you.
- NOAA is now actively seeking applications for this position through November 13. I encourage you to make sure that people in whom you have confidence apply for the position. I intend to have this position filled by the end of the year.
- Until then, I have asked Gordon Colvin, who many of you know from his years of work in New York State, to serve in an interim capacity so that the new senior policy advisor can hit the ground running in 2010.

- In addition to Gordon, the new senior policy advisor will also be able to draw on assistance from Forbes Darby and Marty Golden, who both focus on angler issues for NOAA. Plus, I have asked Andy Winer, my director of external affairs at NOAA headquarters, to work with them, and with you, to make sure I'm hearing your concerns. These individuals will serve as your points of contact. I will also hold them accountable for meeting you half-way in building a productive relationship. When you have questions about what we're doing, call them. If you have ideas or concerns, let them know.
- We also intend to identify coordinators within each of NOAA's regional offices and science centers to work closely with the senior policy advisor. Our goal is to ensure that there is a network of knowledgeable staff and resources within NOAA Fisheries that is focused squarely on making

recreational fishing work better.

- In addition to these designated positions, I have instructed the NOAA team to convene a recreational fishing summit next year to identify issues of concern and possible solutions. We intend to work very closely with the recreational fishing community to determine the timing and location of the summit, to develop the program for the summit, and to work cooperatively after the summit to implement policies designed to improve our relationship.
- From these actions, you should get the message that we at NOAA are listening. We are responding to the concerns expressed by your leaders that we don't pay enough attention to recreational fishing. I'm here to tell you that we do think you are important, that we will pay attention, and

that we will work with you.

- It is my intention to improve our relationship. I look forward to a new era of cooperative relations between NOAA and anglers across this country.

### ***DATA ISSUES***

- As we begin our dialogue on issues of mutual concern, I welcome constructive discussions on two critical issues: (1) improving the collection of data relating to recreational fishing; and (2) the potential implementation of a national catch shares policy.
- Under-pinning these two topics are two other issues that we must address: (1) how do we prevent overfishing so that we can ensure that that our children and grandchildren will also have opportunities to fish?; and (2) what should be the basis

for allocating catch? Let me touch on each of these briefly, understanding that each merits a more comprehensive discussion.

- For years, recreational anglers have expressed concerns about the use of the data collected by the Marine Recreational Fisheries Survey as a tool for making ocean management decisions.
- Although MRFSS represents the best scientific data available, it isn't anywhere as good as we need for good management policies for recreational fisheries. We need data that are accurate and credible, data in which you and we have confidence, and data that are timely. Doing all of that is a tall order.

- NOAA has begun to implement its new Marine Recreational Information Program or MRIP. This new system was intended to provide information to fairly and sustainably manage fish stocks and their surrounding ecosystems.

However, I understand that you and others have serious reservations about the extent to which MRIP will provide timely data. I understand and appreciate those concerns.

Moreover, I applaud ASA for working with a broad coalition to give us useful feedback. Broad-based partnerships are powerful. My staff and I look forward to continuing the dialogue.

- Our intent is to design a data-acquisition process that meets our needs, one in which we all have confidence, and one that enables us to manage recreational fishing to ensure the fishery is sustainable, the ocean is healthy and there are

great fishing opportunities for your children and grandchildren. We welcome your continued input on MRIP.

### ***CATCH SHARES***

- Let me now turn to the topic of catch shares.
- My goal with catch shares is to provide the councils with a variety of tools to ensure that we meet our obligation to end overfishing as required by the Magnuson-Stevens Act. Catch shares have been shown to work well for commercial fisheries as long as they are properly designed. In the next few minutes, I will describe what catch shares are, why I believe they will benefit both commercial and recreational fishing, and where we need your input in the next steps. These discussions are timely because NOAA is currently developing its Draft Catch Share Policy, which resulted from

the work of the Catch Shares Policy Task Force which I formed earlier this year.

- In general, “catch share” is a generic term for several fishery management strategies that allocate a specific portion of the total allowable fishery catch to individuals, cooperatives, communities, or other entities. Each recipient of a catch share is directly accountable to stop fishing when its specific quota is reached.
- This means that individual fishermen who play by the rules will be part of a system that meets fishery targets. Each fisherman has a strong incentive to play by the rules because he or she will benefit directly from a healthy fishery.

- Catch shares include specific programs defined in law such as “limited access privilege” (or LAPS) and “individual fishing quota” programs (or IFQs).
- NOAA’s draft catch share program will likely encourage Councils to consider and adopt catch share programs wherever appropriate in fishery management and ecosystem plans with the goal of achieving long term sustainability of our nation’s fishery resources and fishing communities.
- I believe that catch share programs can be a valuable tool in achieving this goal, but let me be clear about one thing: no Council will be required to adopt a catch share program. Councils will be free to consider a variety of management alternatives and to determine what is best for a particular fishery.

- This means, for example, that Councils could decide that a commercial fishery should have a catch share program, but that such a program is not appropriate for a recreational fishery.
- Now you may wonder how something that is good for commercial fishing could also be good for recreational fishing. To me, the answer is simple: successful catch share programs should result in more fish in the ocean and healthier oceans. Because commercial catches do not exceed the limits, there are more fish to reproduce and thus more fish to be caught in the future.
- I am mindful that some members of the recreational fishing community have expressed concerns that a catch shares program would amount to a give away of public trust

resources, and that allocations under such a program will restrict anglers' access to fishing stocks. These concerns are unfounded. The law prohibits creating a private right. We do not have the authority to give it away. A catch share is a privilege.

- Catch shares as designed to date can't easily work for 12 million saltwater anglers. But it is worth exploring ways for trading of allocation to work across the commercial-recreational divide and allowing markets to resolve some of the challenging allocation decisions.
- So my main point is that well-managed fisheries will benefit all fishermen and that catch shares are a powerful tool to end overfishing by commercial fishermen. Doing so will benefit saltwater anglers.

- I invite you to work with us to ensure that recreational fishing is sustainable as well.
- As I mentioned earlier, NOAA is developing a Draft Catch Share Policy. The draft has undergone considerable revision and we continue to refine it based on very helpful input from many interested parties.
- After its release, NOAA will seek additional input for 120 days before releasing its final report. I encourage all of your members to let us know your concerns and to work with Gordon Colvin, Forbes Darby, Marty Golden, and Andy Winer to make sure that you get answers to all of your questions.

***Ocean Policy Task Force and Administration's Commitment to  
Recreational Fishing***

- I also want to briefly mention the work of President Obama's Ocean Policy Task Force, which was formed in June.
- President Obama charged the Task Force with developing recommendations for a national ocean policy that ensures protection, maintenance and restoration of our oceans, coasts and Great Lakes, and with recommending a framework for improved stewardship and effective coastal and marine spatial planning. The President also set a very aggressive timeline.
- Along with 23 other high-level officials across all of the relevant agencies and offices, I have had the pleasure of serving on this Task Force. Although the break-neck pace

has presented challenges, I believe that the discussions and public input have been immensely helpful. We do need a national ocean policy that protects our resources and ensures that, among other things, future generations will be able to enjoy access to abundant and well managed fisheries.

- Since its formation in June, the Task Force has sponsored over 20 expert roundtables and organized public meetings in Alaska, California, Hawaii, Rhode Island, and Louisiana. Recreational fishermen have been well represented at many of these. The Task Force has also input from hundreds of interested individuals through the website [whitehouse.gov/oceans](https://www.whitehouse.gov/oceans), and we will continue to seek input over the next month before the Task Force issues its next report in December.

- Last month, the Task Force released its Interim Report. Some members of the recreational fishing community contend that the interests of anglers were not included.
- As an active participant in the Task Force process, I want to assure the recreational fishing community that this concern has been heard. The Task Force has now received significant input from anglers across the country. I am confident that when the Task Force releases its final report, your interests will be recognized.
- Furthermore, because I believe that recreational fishing is both an important pastime which brings families and friends together and an important economic activity, I am personally committed to a national policy which recognizes the importance of recreational fishing and ensures that it can continue to thrive.

## ***CONCLUSION***

- In conclusions, I've touched on a number of important topics: improving NOAA's relationship with saltwater anglers, improving the quality of the data we use to manage recreational fisheries, catch shares, and the President's Ocean Policy Task Force.
- In the coming months, I look forward to working with all of you on all of these topics. It's time to begin a new chapter in our relationship.
- I recognize that we have just started a conversation on issues of mutual interest, but I believe that our communications will form the foundation of a lasting relationship which will be beneficial to anglers and to NOAA.

- When I imagine a future with the recreational community, here is what I hope for: An agency that you feel you can work with, and that makes its decisions based on sound and well-reasoned science. One that makes it clear to you that we appreciate the many social, economic, and environmental benefits that saltwater fishing brings. An agency that is responsive and finds ways to make resources more accessible, even as we work to solve the myriad challenges that face our oceans today. And an agency that understands America's rich fishing heritage and is committed to a future that involves providing quality recreational opportunities for our angling community.
- I have appreciated the opportunity to speak with you, I hope that you have a productive summit, and welcome the chance to answer a few of your questions, and look forward to our joint future

- Thank You