

<i>NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE POLICY 04-114</i> Effective on: September 21, 2023	
To be reviewed on: September 21, 2028	
Science and Technology	
Recreational Fishery Catch and Effort Survey Design	
NOTICE: This publication is available at: https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/laws-and-policies/policy-directive-system	
Author name: Richard Cody, Ph.D. Office: F/ST1	Certified by: Evan Howell, Ph.D. Office: F/ST
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SUMMARY OF REVISIONS: The directive is revised to streamline the certification process and focus certification review on scientific peer review of survey designs.	

I. Introduction

When Congress reauthorized the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA; 16 U.S.C. § 1801 et seq.) in 2006, it added Section 401(g), 16 U.S.C. § 1881(g)(3), which requires that the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) establish a program to improve the quality and accuracy of information generated by the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS). It further required that the program take into consideration, and, to the extent feasible, implement the recommendations of the National Research Council’s 2006 report, Review of Recreational Fisheries Survey Methods. Accordingly, the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) has been developing new and modified survey designs to provide more accurate, precise, and timely statistical estimates of recreational fishing catch and effort.

Decisions to incorporate recreational catch and effort data from MRIP’s improved survey methods into NMFS’s legacy databases for stock assessments and management must be based on scientifically sound evaluations of the new survey designs. To that end, MRIP established a rigorous process to certify new and legacy recreational catch and effort survey designs and estimation methods. A critical component of the certification process is the independent peer review of survey and estimation methods proposed for certification. Once certified, the methodology for a full survey or a component thereof, is eligible for implementation and potential MRIP funding, subject to funding availability. In general, MRIP only supports surveys (via funding, staff, etc.) that apply methods that have been MRIP certified. However, MRIP may support continued use of legacy survey methods, i.e. those that have been in use to provide recreational catch statistics, that are not certified, provided: (1) the data produced by such surveys have been used in peer reviewed applications, such as NMFS fisheries stock assessments; (2) an MRIP Regional Implementation Plan identifies the need to

continue such survey; and (3) a plan to certify those survey methods is in place and is being followed.

1.1 Transition Plan

Once new or improved certified survey designs are implemented, the designs may result in changes to catch estimates that render legacy estimates, derived from earlier survey designs, inconsistent with (i.e., higher or lower than) the estimates made with the new design. In such cases, NMFS must appropriately transition from current to new survey methods. The difference in catch estimates resulting from use of modified data collection designs must be accounted for prior to using the results of the new methods in catch time series for stock assessments or for management accounting. This policy, therefore, directs that a transition plan must be prepared for the implementation of any modifications to survey sampling or estimation methods that may result in consistently higher or lower statistical estimates of catch or effort as compared to estimates based on replaced or modified survey and estimation designs. A transition plan must outline the steps and activities needed to ensure a smooth transition to the new survey method, while taking into account the necessary time and effort to incorporate new estimates into the science and management processes. Until such a plan is approved and implemented, the statistics resulting from use of the modified methods should not be treated as the Best Scientific Information Available (BSIA) for use in fishery stock assessments and management actions. To coordinate development of such transition plans, an MRIP Transition Team has been established, co-led by the NMFS Office of Science and Technology and the Office of Sustainable Fisheries.

1.2 Certification

To be considered for MRIP certification, recreational catch and effort survey design and estimation method components must fall into one of three categories:

- 1) New or replacement designs and methods;
- 2) Modifications or recommended improvements to existing designs and methods, or
- 3) Existing survey designs and estimation methods.

To be considered MRIP certified, surveys or survey components must:

- 1) Provide sufficient documentation to support a technical review of survey methods, including documentation requirements specified in [Recreational Fishing Survey and Data Standards Documentation Guidance](#), and in the MRIP Survey and Data Standards, Standard 2, sections 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, and 2.4;
- 2) Be peer reviewed and supported by conclusions from the reviewers that the Terms of Reference have been met;
- 3) Be recommended for approval by the MRIP Program Management Team (PMT) and other MRIP teams assigned by the PMT to review the survey;
- 4) Be approved by the MRIP Executive Steering Committee (ESC); and

5) Be approved by NMFS Leadership.

II. Objective

The objectives of this policy are as follow:

2.1 Ensure that new and improved recreational catch and effort survey designs implemented by NMFS or its partners provide data that: (1) meet the requirements of the Information Quality Act (IQA) and (2) fulfill the requirements of 50 CFR §600.315, and are therefore eligible to be accepted as BSIA under the MSA in the assessment and management of the nation's marine fisheries, taking into consideration other relevant factors that may determine what constitutes BSIA as per the NOAA Fisheries National Standard 2 Guidelines.

2.2 Establish that only survey designs that have been certified, or are on a path to certification, hereunder are eligible for technical and funding support for implementation by NMFS.

2.3 Ensure the comparability of long-term time series of recreational fishery catch and effort statistics as new, statistically valid survey designs are implemented to replace or supplement existing survey designs, and to ensure the efficient integration of appropriately calibrated statistics into fishery science products and fishery management measures.

III. Authorities and Responsibilities

Under the following authorities, this policy establishes the following responsibilities.

3.1 Authority for this directive is provided by the MSA 04-11 Section 401(g), 16 U.S.C 1881(g)(3), and by the National Standards Guidelines at 50 CFR 315.

3.2 The Office of Science and Technology (OST) is responsible for executing the certification process and for ensuring that only surveys operated in compliance with this policy are eligible to receive funding and technical support from programs funded through the Fisheries Statistics Division of the OST. The OST is responsible for coordinating all scientific reviews and analyses relating to MRIP surveys under consideration for certification.

3.3 The NMFS Chief Science Advisor & Director of Scientific Programs is responsible for final approval of all certified survey designs.

3.4 OST and the Office of Sustainable Fisheries (OSF) co-lead the Transition Team. OST is responsible for ensuring transition plans are prepared whenever new or modified recreational fishing catch or effort survey designs are deemed appropriate for implementation, but produce statistical estimates consistently higher or lower than legacy survey design estimates. OST coordinates all aspects of science input to transition plans. OSF coordinates all aspects of fishery management input to transition plans.

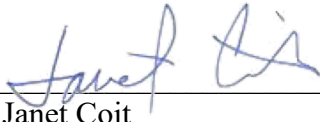
IV. Measuring Effectiveness

The effectiveness of this policy directive can be assessed through monitoring to ensure surveys

provided with funding and technical support are certified or are continuing legacy surveys that meet the requirements stated in Section I above and that catch statistics provided by certified survey designs are eligible for use as BSIA in peer-reviewed fisheries stock assessments.

V. References

Procedure 04-114-01 Guidance and Procedures for the Transition Process for Modification of Recreational Fishing Catch and Effort Methods is being re-issued concurrently with this revised policy to ensure effective implementation. Procedure 04-114-02 Guidance and Procedures for the MRIP Certification Process is being issued concurrently with this revised policy. Other procedural directives will be issued to implement this policy as needed.

Signed  _____ 09/27/2023
Janet Coit Date
Assistant Administrator for Fisheries