

NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE PROCEDURE 04-114-01

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Science and Technology

Implementing Recreational Fishery Catch and Effort Survey Design Changes 04-114

Guidance and Procedures for the Transition Process for Modification of Recreational Fishing
Catch and Effort Methods

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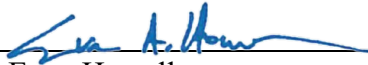
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SUMMARY OF REVISIONS:

This revision addresses three primary subjects:

- A new section is added titled “Assuring utility of data from new or modified surveys.” This section provides that estimates produced by the new or modified survey(s) need to meet NOAA Fisheries requirements to the same or a greater degree than the statistics provided by the survey(s) being replaced or modified.
- The revisions identify the responsibilities of partners sponsoring survey changes for components of the transition process, and specify required process steps and transition plan components. That is, the procedure generally replaces “should” with “will” and “must” in detailing the transition plan process and plan requirements.
- Attachment A, the Transition Team Terms of Reference (ToR) is deleted. These ToR are not relevant to, nor are they referred to in, the procedure. They are retained in our records and on the website, just not here.

Signed:  1/17/2025
Evan Howell Date
Director, Office of Science and Technology

I. Introduction

When Congress reauthorized the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (16 U.S.C. § 1801 et seq.) in 2006, it added Section 401(g) to require the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) to establish a program to improve the quality and accuracy of information generated by the Marine

Recreational Fishery Statistics Survey. See 16 U.S.C. § 1881(g)(3). 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 Survey Methods](#). Accordingly, the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) has been developing new and modified survey designs for tracking recreational fishing effort and catch and to provide more accurate and timely statistical estimates of cumulative totals throughout each fishing season.

NOAA Fisheries' MRIP recognized the need to appropriately transition from current to new recreational fishing surveys, in light of substantial design improvements. This procedure's guidance implements [Policy Directive \(PD\) 04-114](#), for transition to new recreational fishing catch and effort survey methods.

PD 04-114 provides that a Transition Plan must be prepared for the implementation of any modifications of survey sampling or estimation methods that may result in consistently higher or lower statistical estimates of recreational fishing catch or effort. This requirement applies to survey and estimation methods developed and implemented by NOAA Fisheries and by its state and interstate partners if such survey and estimation methods produce statistics used by NOAA Fisheries to assess stocks under management or to support mandated fishery management actions. The MRIP Executive Steering Committee (ESC) established the MRIP Transition Team to develop and recommend standardized processes for transitioning from historical estimates to estimates derived from improved sampling and estimation designs. This procedure establishes and describes the role and responsibilities of the Transition Team and the general transition approach when new survey designs are implemented. A transition plan outline is provided at the end of this document, to be used as a general guide for the Transition Team.

II. Objective

It is the policy of NOAA Fisheries to ensure the comparability of long-term time series of recreational fishery catch and effort statistics as new, more statistically valid survey designs are implemented to replace or supplement legacy survey designs and to ensure the efficient integration of appropriately calibrated statistics into fishery science products and fishery management measures.

III. Guidance

Transition Team Role and Responsibilities

The interagency Transition Team is co-led by NOAA Fisheries Office of Science and Technology and Office of Sustainable Fisheries. The team comprises representatives from NOAA Fisheries, the regional fishery management councils, the interstate marine fisheries commissions, and several state agencies. To implement a new or improved survey method, historical catch statistics first need to be converted into the same 'currency' as the new estimates of recreational fishing catch and effort. The Transition Team develops and executes appropriate transition plans to ensure this happens. The Transition Team establishes processes

that will enable scientists and fishery managers to make “apples to apples” comparisons between new and historical catch statistics, providing a framework that decision-makers can use for integrating new data into science and management activities at the regional and state level. The Transition Team plays an important role in coordinating consistent approaches and methods so councils, interstate commissions, and NOAA Fisheries Regions can successfully:

1. Determine the status of exploited stocks,
2. Set annual catch limits,
3. Monitor catch against catch limits,
4. Assess the need for and selection of accountability measures, and
5. Conduct analyses leading to the adoption of recreational fishing regulations.

General Transition Approach

The first step in the process is to develop a transition plan for the new design that describes the most appropriate processes for transitioning from historical estimates to estimates derived from improved sampling and estimation designs. The MRIP Transition Team will establish subgroups to address region-specific issues. The subgroups will include existing Transition Team members from the appropriate region(s), including members of MRIP’s Regional Implementation Teams, and any other staff those members deem appropriate, and will be convened as needed for transition planning.

In consultation with the Transition Team or the applicable Regional subgroup, the sponsoring agency for the new or revised survey must complete several steps before estimates based on any new design can be used effectively in the management and stock assessment processes. Ordinarily, the steps below must be fully completed as described, unless the sponsoring agency can demonstrate that a step can be modified, or an alternative can be utilized, to achieve transitional objectives.

1. **Assuring utility of data from new or modified surveys:** Estimates produced by the new or modified survey(s) need to meet NOAA Fisheries requirements to the same or a greater degree than the statistics provided by the survey(s) being replaced or modified. Survey sponsors will consult with responsible MRIP Regional Implementation Teams, including NOAA Fisheries Regional Fishery Science Centers, Regional Offices, or other responsible management offices, to determine the scope of the essential elements of estimates. This initial step should be completed before substantial resources are committed to benchmarking, calibration, and the remaining steps in the transition process.

Transition Plans must:

- a. Describe the data fields to be provided by the new survey design, compare them to the survey being replaced, and assess whether any essential data fields will not be available in the new survey if transition is completed. If so, a plan to replace the missing essential data fields must be completed and executed before the transition can proceed. Survey sponsors are encouraged to conduct this assessment before seeking Certification of the survey design, and document the favorable comparison in the survey documentation compiled per section III.i.1 of [PD 04-114-02](#). If not compiled at the Certification stage, then it is best to complete this assessment at the earliest stage of transition planning, so

if survey modifications are necessary, they can be completed prior to benchmarking and calibration. Depending on the degree of modification needed, the survey's certification may also need to be revisited.

- b. Include a complete data management plan for the new/modified survey, including a description of database formatting and data structure, data access, and where/how the data will be maintained. The plan must include the method and timing of data delivery and updating to NOAA Fisheries science and management users.
 - c. Include a timeline that assures initial use and reliance on the calibrated estimates from the new survey does not occur until the estimates and associated data management program are fully developed and ready for use in both in-season and end-of-season management actions and to meet the requirements of scheduled stock assessments.
2. **Benchmarking:** Conduct the newly designed survey side-by-side with the legacy survey, when feasible, for a sufficient period, usually at last one full year, to allow measurement and evaluation of consistent differences in the statistical estimates produced. During this benchmarking period, statistical estimates produced by the legacy design are generally still considered the [Best Scientific Information Available](#) for use in fishery stock assessments, establishing overfishing limits and annual catch limits (ACLs), monitoring catches relative to ACLs, and making management decisions.
3. **Calibration model development:** Evaluate differences between new design and legacy design estimates that are consistently unidirectional, and significant increases in the variances of estimates resulting from new designs, to determine possible sources of bias to explain those differences. In addition, conduct literature research to assess how biases identified in the legacy design would most likely have changed over time. Based on the information gained, develop and evaluate one or more calibration models for possible use in correcting past catch statistics. Consider alternative models and select one as the preferred model, subject to validation by an external peer review. Independent, external peer reviews of calibration models will be conducted following development of the models and prior to re-estimation of catch histories. The peer review process will be conducted consistent with established agency practice, and will comply with Information Quality Act requirements. Appropriate Transition Team members from NOAA Fisheries and/or regional partners will be involved in developing a statement of work for each review.
4. **Re-estimation of historical catch statistics:** Once a calibration model has been developed, independently reviewed, and approved, use the model to generate an adjusted time series of recreational catch statistics that were generated by the legacy design. Immediately make the adjusted time series available to domestic fishery stock assessment scientists and fishery managers.
5. **Incorporation of new estimates into stock assessments and economic analyses:** Incorporate the revised catch and effort statistics derived from the calibration model into stock assessments and economic analyses as soon as possible to provide the most accurate assessments of stock status, new ACLs for use in fisheries management, updated information relevant to sector allocations and economic impacts management, and updated

information relevant to sector allocations and economic impacts. Identify stocks with very substantial mortality levels due to recreational fishing (relative to that caused by commercial fishing) as “key stocks” and prioritize those stocks for assessment scheduling. Depending on the magnitude of the estimation changes and potential disruption of the management process, assessments scheduled for key stocks may have to be moved to earlier dates while those scheduled for non-key stocks are moved to later dates.

6. **Incorporation of new estimates and ACLs into management actions:** As soon as revised catch statistics and new assessment results based on revised catch statistics become available, management will begin to use both for decision making. If revised statistics are available but new assessments are not, then managers may need to continue using the statistics based on the legacy design until new assessment results are available. In years when the legacy design is no longer being conducted, use the approved calibration model to convert catch estimates based on the new design into estimates that are compatible with the legacy design for use in management.

An example of a transition plan outline is as follows:

- I. Executive Summary
- II. Introduction and Purpose
- III. Description of Approach and Timeline
- IV. Potential Stock Assessment Impacts and Schedule
- V. Potential Management Impacts and Schedule
- VI. Identification of Unknowns
- VII. Lessons Learned
- VIII. Appendices