UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
GREATER ATLANTIC REGIONAL FISHERIES OFFICE
55 Great Republic Drive
Gloucester, MA 01930

# Mid-Atlantic Recreational Roundtable Webinar Summary

**Host:** The Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO)

**Date:** March 31, 2026

**Purpose:** To connect NOAA Fisheries' Greater Atlantic leadership with the recreational fishing community.

**Attendance:** Over 60 members of the public, alongside staff from NOAA Fisheries, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, the Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council, and various state fisheries departments.

## Updates on Recreational Catch Data Collection

NOAA Fisheries staff provided an update on upcoming improvements to recreational catch data collection, providing an opportunity to gather stakeholder feedback on regional fisheries management. Key initiatives discussed included:

- **Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) and Fishing Effort Survey (FES):** NOAA Fisheries staff provided an update on efforts underway to adjust potential overestimations within the FES. A calibrated historical data time series is scheduled for publication in the summer of 2026. Any needed management adjustments in the Mid-Atlantic will not be considered until this updated data has been fully integrated into future formal stock assessments.
- **Recreational Angler Partnership Improvement Directive (RAPID):** This new initiative is designed to foster a collaborative state-federal partnership. The goal is to create a state-federal data collection system for marine and estuarine recreational fisheries that is regionally specific, while also being nationally coherent. The new system will leverage partner expertise and resources to obtain the best quality data possible from available sources to inform sustainable, adaptive fisheries management.

## Industry Feedback:

- **Call for a New Data System and Technology Modernization**
  - Participants recommended replacing the outdated MRIP system with a modern, technology-driven approach, such as AI, to get real-time information.
  - NOAA Fisheries staff confirmed the RAPID initiative will explore using modern technologies like satellite and mobile cell phone data to create a new state/federal partnership for data collection. The key challenge will be validating

non-probability data (like angler app data) to ensure reliable estimates for management.

- **Impact of MRIP Correction on Quota Allocation**
    - Anglers questioned whether correcting the overestimation in the FES would reverse previous quota shifts from the recreational to the commercial sector.
    - NOAA Fisheries staff stated that we must wait for stock assessments to incorporate the corrected data before determining if any management changes are needed, and noted that Councils will consider recommendations to NOAA Fisheries on allocation.
- **Research Needed for Offshore Wind Areas**
    - A key research question was raised regarding whether the artificial reef habitats created by offshore wind turbine areas genuinely *increase* fish stock size or simply attract fish from existing natural structures.
    - The Northeast Fishery Science Center agreed and is already exploring three fishery-independent methods—pilot hook-and-line surveys, video trap surveys, and unmanned acoustic systems—to measure fish abundance and capture any true increase in biomass for use in assessment models.

**Stakeholder Feedback and Management Priorities**

During the feedback session on Mid-Atlantic recreational fishing, stakeholders shared several strong opinions regarding management and ecosystem health:

- **Regulatory Stability:** Anglers expressed significant frustration over frequent, erratic ("yo-yoing") changes to recreational measures. Participants strongly advocated for long-term regulatory stability, especially when fish stocks are considered healthy.
- **Ecosystem and Climate Concerns:** Concerns were raised about climate-driven species shifts, and the impacts of the depletion of forage fish populations.
- **Communication:** Several anglers recommended NOAA Fisheries issue simplified, plain-language communications.
- **Harvest Culture:** Participants stressed the cultural significance of harvesting fish for consumption, as it conflicts with management approaches that they feel heavily favor catch-and-release practices.
- **Sector Separation:** To address the unique needs of the for-hire fleet, there is increasing support for "sector separation," which involves implementing different management practices for the for-hire charter fleets and private anglers.
- **Future Data Modernization:** The recreational fishing community voiced broad support for modernizing data collection through real-time technology, such as mobile applications, electronic reports, and cameras. However, this support was conditioned on the requirement that these technological efforts must not violate angler privacy or result in burdensome paperwork.

NOAA Fisheries will use the feedback heard at this roundtable to finalize the agenda for the 2027 National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Summit. The agency will also continue collaborative efforts with state commissions and anglers to advance the RAPID initiative. Suggested topics for the 2027 National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Summit agenda from the Mid-Atlantic region include:

- Balanced participation between harvest and catch-and-release groups
- Forage fish management
- Localized cooperative research
- The specific needs of lower socioeconomic anglers