

<b><i>NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE POLICY 04-114</i></b> Effective on: September 5, 2019	
To be reviewed on: September 2024	
Science and Technology	
Implementing Recreational Fishery Catch and Effort Survey Design Changes	
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<b>SUMMARY OF REVISIONS:</b> Expanded to assure that new and modified recreational catch and effort survey designs are capable of producing scientifically sound data.	

## 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), 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 Fishery Statistics Survey (MRFSS). *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 Fisheries 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.

Decisions to substitute recreational catch and effort data, derived from new and improved survey methods developed through MRIP into NMFS legacy databases derived from previously conducted survey designs, used for fisheries stock assessments and management decisions must be based on robust determinations that the new designs are scientifically sound. Further, measures must be taken to enable incorporation of estimates derived via new methods into existing time series of recreational catch with minimal disruption. Toward 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 funds availability. In general, MRIP only supports surveys (via funding, staff, etc.) that apply methods that have been MRIP

certified. However, MRIP may support continuing 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 has been utilized 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

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 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.

Moreover, to be eligible for funding consideration, certified survey components must be relevant to marine recreational fisheries data collection within the scope of MRIP, provide data currently being provided by MRIP, and meet standards of MRIP survey components for statistical robustness available at (add correct web link when final) \_\_\_\_\_.

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

- 1) Adhere to applicable MRIP standards and procedures including: the MRIP Program Management, Policy and Procedural Manual: MRIP Data Standards; [Recreational Fishing Survey Standards and Best Practices](#); other MRIP standards as applicable.

- 2) Be peer reviewed and supported by the results of the review;
- 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; and
- 5) Be approved by NMFS Leadership.

## II. Objective

The objectives of this Policy are to assure that new and improved recreational catch and effort survey designs implemented by NMFS or its partners provide data that: meet the requirements of the Information Quality Act; are eligible to be accepted as Best Scientific Information Available (BSIA) under the MSA; and can be efficiently incorporated into time series of catch data for fisheries stock assessments and management decision-making. Specifically:

2.1: 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. It is the further objective of this Policy to require that certified survey designs provide only those recreational catch and effort statistics that fulfill the requirements of 50 CFR §600.315, and will therefore be eligible to be considered as BSIA in the assessment and management of the Nation's marine fisheries, taking into consideration other relevant factors that may determine what constitutes BSIA.

2.2: 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 legacy survey designs, and to ensure the efficient integration of appropriately calibrated statistics into fishery science products and fishery management measures.

## III. Authorities and Responsibilities

This policy directive establishes the following authorities and responsibilities.

3.1 The Office of Science and Technology (ST) 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 Office of Science and Technology. ST is responsible for coordinating all scientific reviews and analyses relating to MRIP surveys under consideration for certification.

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

3.3 ST and the Office of Sustainable Fisheries (SF) co-lead the Transition Team.

- ST 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 that are consistently higher or lower than

legacy survey design estimates. ST coordinates all aspects of science input to Transition Plans.

- SF 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 assure that:

- Surveys that are provided with funding and technical support are certified or are continuing legacy surveys that meet the requirements stated in Section I above; and
- 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 for Certification of Recreational Fisheries Catch and Effort Survey and Estimation Methods is being issued concurrently with this revised policy. Other procedural directives will be issued to implement this policy as needed.

Signed  09/05/2019  
Chris Oliver Date  
Assistant Administrator for Fisheries