



**Randy Fisher, Executive Director
Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission
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House Subcommittee on Insular Affairs – Oceans and Wildlife

Good morning. My name is Randy Fisher and I am the Executive Director of the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission. The Commission's member states are Alaska, Washington, Oregon, California and Idaho.

We manage a number of the fishery databases on the West Coast and Alaska, that are used by the states, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), and the Pacific and North Pacific Fishery Management Councils.

I have been asked to address my views from a West Coast perspective in three areas; first, the progress in improving the quality and accuracy of data collected to manage recreational fisheries; second, monitoring needs to improve fisheries data and ensure accountability, and; third, any additional issues that may be important to the subcommittee to

On the West Coast we have made considerable progress in the quality and accuracy of our recreational fishery data. We have an estimated 7 million marine recreational fishery trips per year by over 2 million anglers.

The Commission has been managing the Ocean Recreational Data since 1979. Our program coordinates field sampling and direct phone sample line to collect catch and effort data. This program estimates total ocean sport effort by boat type (charter and private) and interviews are conducted randomly of ocean boats to generate estimates of catch for both salmon and non-salmon species. Catch per boat data and angler counts are collected at least several days a week, including all weekends and holidays in all major ports. Anglers are interviewed at boat ramps, moorages and charteredocks. Catch is sampled for species, fin marks, scales, length and some weight. Charterboat effort in most ports is estimated by contacting charter offices for their count of boat trips by trip type.

In 2003 the West Coast embarked on a new program to address the concerns of the Marine Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS) phone survey program. With additional funding from California we developed a sampling program that address the large number of boat launch sites and private marines that exist in California. Sample rates vary, but the overall goal is 20% of all ocean trips for the entire West coast. Our estimates are generated monthly with a 1 month lag.

To be a little more specific, in the State of Washington we do exit counts of all ports and we do a dockside sample of catch by species and we do some at-sea rides of charters for catch and discards. In Oregon we do exit counts at major and minor ports. We do dockside sampling of catch by species and we do sea-rides on charters for discards and catch data.

In California we do trailer/boat counts all day at primary sites 8 times a month and 3 times a month at minor sites. At these sites we do boat surveys at the completion of the trip for catch by species.

For charters we do weekly surveys of skippers (10-20%) and we do sample rides for catch/discards and area. For man-made structures we do angler counts at sites upon arrival and departure and an angler survey at completion of the trip. For beach bank and private boat access, we do a monthly angler license frame phone survey and we calculate catch rates from the same trip at public sites.

So what progress have we made? We went from a system largely dependant upon a random phone survey to a system of people at the docks counting fishermen and fish by species and size. Without a doubt our data has improved and without a doubt the credibility of the data in the eyes of the users has markedly improved. Between 2003 and 2004 when we went to the new system we had a 312% increase in fish counted, we had a 303% increase in angler's interviews and we had a 120% increase in days sampled.

What did it take? A \$1 million dollar commitment by National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), a \$1 million dollar commitment by the State of California and \$800,000 by Oregon and Washington.

On the West Coast today we spend a total of \$4.3 million annually in State and Federal funds to manage our recreational data program. Each state has a marine fishing license and each state is accustomed to managing by quotas, which become a necessity after some court decisions.

Since 2003 in the Fisheries Management Council process the arguments over the numbers of recreational fish caught have all but evaporated. Arguments over allocations are another matter.

To the second question, that of monitoring needs to improve fisheries data and ensure accountability. An analogy similar to this question would be -- How much effort and money should we spend to ensure everyone follows speed limits? This can get very expensive, very fast.

I believe there is some basic information we need to responsibility manage our fisheries whether it is commercial or recreational. You need to know how many people are fishing, you need to know how many fish they catch and you need to know what species of fish they are catching. You also need to get this information in a timely way for management actions. There may be a number of ways to get that information and it probably doesn't have to be 100% inclusive or accurate.

On the West Coast the states provide 50-70% of the funding for this recreational data program. We need an additional \$1.5 million to fully implement our program. This \$1.5 million would bring us to 20% sample average of all modes of marine recreational fishing – that is ocean, shore and marine inland.

We are currently making catch estimates in some of our fisheries on a weekly basis because of very low catch quotas. Does this work? Yes. Does it cost more? Yes.

Commercial and Recreational Fisheries are not the same everywhere. Given that monitoring needs and methods need to be flexible, however, they need to answer the basic questions of effort and catch. We improved our program dramatically when we put people on the docks. We get more and better biological information, we get more and better social/economic information, we get more and better catch information and we get back credibility.

I mentioned we have fishery licenses and we have a fairly long time series of this information so we have a good idea of effort. We are sampling areas of effort to determine total catch by species. We are making estimates of catch based on a sample size that averages 20% for the entire coast. The higher you make that number and the speed at which this information is needed, will dictate the cost.

I would like to close by offering some additional thoughts.

NOAA Fisheries and the States are now in a push to improve recreational fisheries data. We, on the West Coast are concerned that funds will be shifted from us to areas that are deemed in need of catching up.

In the past there have been attempts to centralize recreational data and provide a prescription for what data is needed and how it should be gathered. We do not support this approach but do support regional data needs and methods.

In the future our management requirements are going to be further complicated by a perception that more and faster information will lead to more fishing. For example we are now looking at GSI – Genetic Stock Identification on salmon with the idea of opening and closing seasons on a 24 hour turnaround based on the presence or absence of a certain stock of salmon.

I personally believe the appetite for recreational fishing is nearly insatiable. What that means to resource managers is developing methods of control. In our case, it is quotas and allocations, and probably not in the too far distant future LAP's or limited fishery quotas for the recreational charter fleet.

On the West Coast there are a number of recreational fishery groups that want to eliminate some commercial fishery activities. I believe one of the problems they are having is being able to establish a true value of their fishery. Both commercial and recreational fisheries kill fish, even if it is a hook and release. So to claim it is strictly a biological issue is not totally true.

I do not believe decision makers are going to eliminate a commercial fishery and replace it with a recreational fishery unless it can be shown without a doubt that the recreational fishery will result in a better deal economically to the communities that are affected by a commercial closure.

Thank you. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.