

# Meeting held to get input on how to reach out to recreational anglers on importance of MRIP information

by  
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On December 12, RISAA Board members **Greg Vespe** and myself (**Doug MacPherson**) attended a meeting in Plymouth, MA representing Rhode Island recreational saltwater anglers.

The meeting was hosted by **ECS Federal, Inc.**, a contractor for NOAA's Fisheries Statistics Division/ST1, the purpose of which was to obtain feedback on how to better communicate about recreational fishing data, an important topic that directly impacts anglers.



There were 8-10 other recreational fishery representatives in attendance, the majority of whom were Massachusetts charter boat captains. **Patrick Paquette** of Massachusetts Striped Bass Association was also in attendance.

Also in attendance was NOAA Fisheries MRIP (Marine Recreational Information Program) coordinators and NOAA managers.

The folks from NOAA were interested in gathering feedback regarding a new campaign of informational pamphlets, video and public handouts to explain to the public:

- the purpose of the MRIP
- why recreational fisherman should accurately and freely share their catch information with the surveyors if they are approached
- how that data becomes part of the mix of information used to assess the health of fish stocks.

The information and handouts they showed us were very informative, colorful, eye catching and well thought out.

But we were of the opinion that most of them would immediately make their way to the nearest trash bin because they were just too long. For example, one was four card fold-out that was probably 16 inches long. My first reaction was no one at a boat ramp or public fishing area is going to take the time to read it and that was generally agreed upon.

Further advice was offered that a pocket size handout had a much greater chance of being read as a take away item when time allowed.

There was also a fair amount of criticism that the program was not realistically reflecting recreational fishing effort.

The issue of black sea bass was cited by several captains as an example. MRIP data showed a rapidly increasing recreational harvest in the northeast, but this was not reflected in the stock status assessment.

One particular issue noted was that the surveyors can only go on public lands and do not sample on private docks where most of the hard core and better recreational fisherman would probably be likely to be found.

It was also revealed that NOAA was going to move away from targeted random phone calls to a paper/mail distributed survey in an effort to improve data gathering on recreational catch and effort.

The real consensus of the recreational anglers present was for them to find some examples of MRIP success as part of their presentations to show how this relatively new system was working and to improve their outreach by attending important salt water fishing shows and events.

Both Greg and I spoke about what we saw happening in Rhode Island as a real success story. I pointed out that the RIDEM and MRIP programs were represented at the New England Saltwater Fishing Show and Providence Boat Show educating and communicating while NOAA was nowhere to be found as an example of reaching out to the fishing public.

In the end, this group of NOAA managers were receptive and made a point of letting us know our feedback was of value to them and our showing up was appreciated.



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