

# The Modern Fish Act - What It's About

On December 17, 2018 the U.S. Senate unanimously passed S.1520, the Modernizing Recreational Fisheries Management Act of 2017 (Modern Fish Act).

Then, two days later, the U.S. House of Representatives also unanimously passed the bill, sending it to the President's desk to be signed into law.

The legislation, which would make critical updates to the oversight of federal fisheries, marks a big step forward for America's angling community.

The Modern Fish Act, introduced by Senators Roger Wicker (R-Miss.) and Bill Nelson (D-Fla.) in July 2017, enjoyed strong support across the aisle from more than a dozen Senate cosponsors representing coastal and non-coastal states alike. In addition, a coalition of organizations representing the saltwater recreational fishing and boating community endorsed the Modern Fish Act and highlighted the importance of updating the nation's fisheries management system to more accurately distinguish between recreational and commercial fishing.

"This is truly a monumental achievement by the American Sportfishing Association (ASA) and its members, our partner organizations, and anglers across the country," said **ASA President Glenn Hughes**.

"The recreational fishing industry has long been frustrated by the sudden closures and wildly fluctuating fishing regulations that have come from the nation's federal marine fisheries management system," said **Gary Zurn**, senior vice president at Big Rock Sports and ASA's Government Affairs Committee Chairman.

"Through passage of the Modern Fish Act,



Congress is providing direction to NOAA Fisheries on a variety of policies that will ultimately lead to more stable fishing

regulations, and better management and conservation of our marine fisheries."

The version of the Modern Fish Act passed by Congress did not contain some key provisions included in the original bill however, the bill still helps to address many of the priorities for improving federal marine fisheries management, including:

- Clarifying the authority of NOAA Fisheries to apply management approaches more appropriate for recreational fishing;

- Improving recreational harvest data collection by requiring federal managers to explore additional data sources that have tremendous potential to improve the accuracy and timeliness of harvest estimates, such as state-driven programs and electronic reporting (e.g., through smartphone apps);

- Requiring a study on how mixed-use fishery allocations can and should be periodically reviewed by

the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Regional Fishery Management Councils; and

- Requiring a study on limited access privilege programs (catch shares) including an assessment of the social, economic, and ecological effects of the programs.

"To my knowledge, never before has Congress passed a bill focused entirely on the saltwater recreational fishing community," said Mike Leonard, ASA Vice President of Government Affairs. "Passage of the Modern Fish Act proves that the voice of the recreational fishing community is being heard on Capitol Hill. The Modern Fish Act is not the end point, but rather a major step toward evolving federal marine fisheries management in a way that recognizes the importance of saltwater recreational fishing to the nation."

In 2014, the priorities of the recreational fishing and boating community were identified and presented to federal policy makers by the **Commission on Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Management** in a report "A Vision for Managing America's Saltwater Recreational Fisheries." This diverse group made up of a variety of fisheries stakeholders is also referred to as the Morris-Deal Commission, named for co-chairs Johnny Morris, founder and CEO of Bass Pro Shops, and Scott Deal, president of Maverick Boat Group. Four years later, many of the recommendations of the Morris-Deal Commission are found in the Modern Fish Act.

*Editor's Note: RISAA will discuss and explain parts of this new legislation in coming months.*