

# National Saltwater Angler Registry aims to collect fishing data

Saltwater recreational fishermen have long expressed concerns about the data used to estimate the effects of recreational fishing on ocean resources and the nation's economy. The National Saltwater Angler Registry, which launched Jan. 1, will help address that concern by providing a comprehensive list of the nation's saltwater anglers that will be used to improve surveys of fishermen.

These surveys are used by NOAA scientists to assess the health of fish stocks and to estimate the economic contributions of anglers.

Many saltwater recreational fishermen will be required to register before fishing in 2010. The registry opened for registrations on Jan. 1, but those who have a state saltwater fishing license may already be part of the registry.

Rhode Island is one of 10 coastal states that does not currently have comprehensive saltwater angler license or registration requirements. Other states include Hawaii, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Hampshire, Puerto Rico, Virginia and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

R.I. saltwater fishermen will need to register if they fish for or are likely to catch anadromous species in tidal and salt waters – fish like river herring, shad, smelt and striped bass that live in the oceans, but spawn in fresh water – or fish in federal waters more than three miles from the ocean shore or from the mouths of rivers or bays.

Anglers do not have to register if they hold a license from one of 15 coastal states with comprehensive licensing or registration – Alabama, Alaska, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, South Carolina, Texas or Washington – or are not required under state law in one of these 15 states to hold a fishing license, as is sometimes the case with seniors or active-duty military. Also exempt from registering are anglers who are under age 16; pay to fish on licensed charter, party or guide boats; hold a highly mi-

gratory species angling permit or subsistence fishing permit; or fish commercially under a valid license.

Gordon Colvin, a biologist with NOAA's Fisheries Service and interim senior policy advisor on recreational fishing, has spearheaded the registry implementation. He said that many anglers will not need to take any action to register, because their coastal states already have agreements in place with NOAA to share state saltwater fishing license information.

National Saltwater Angler registration is free in 2010. To register, visit [www.countmyfish.noaa.gov](http://www.countmyfish.noaa.gov) and click on the Angler Registry link, or call 1-888-674-7411.

Anglers will need to provide their name, date of birth, address and telephone number, and will receive a registration number that will allow them to begin fishing immediately. They will receive a registration card in the mail in about 30 days.

Steve Medeiros, executive director of the R.I. Saltwater Anglers Association and a leading advocate for a saltwater fishing license in R.I., said the registry is an important step.

"While it's true that some fishermen don't like the idea of having to register to participate in a sport they've taken for granted their whole lives, anyone fishing today knows that increasing pressures on the ocean are having a real effect," he said. "If we're going to pass the sport down to our children and grandchildren, we're going to need sound management based on good data."

The registry will be used as the basis for conducting surveys of saltwater recreational fishermen to find out how often they fish. It will eventually replace the use of random-digit dialing to coastal households, a system NOAA has had in place since the 1970s. The goal is to improve survey efficiency and reduce bias by making calls only to homes where people fish, and reaching saltwater anglers who live outside coastal counties.

Recreational fishermen should also remember that regardless of whether an individual is registered with NOAA, they must obey all state regulations and licensing requirements where they are fishing.

Visit [www.noaa.gov](http://www.noaa.gov) for more information.






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