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**NOAA FISHERIES DEVELOPS A NEW METHOD OF SURVEYING
CHARTER BOAT FISHING TRIPS**

The National Marine Fisheries Service has developed a new data collection method for estimating the number of fishing trips taken annually by recreational fishing charter boats, the Commerce Department announced today.

“Although recreational fishing charter boats represent a small portion of marine recreational fishing trips, they are of particular importance to fishery managers because of the experience and expertise of the captains, and the economic value of this fishery,” said Mark Holliday, NOAA Fisheries division chief for statistics and economics. “Information on the number of trips they make provides significant data for biological stock assessments and fishery resource allocation decisions.”

The new recreational fishing data collection method will be part of the Marine Recreational Fishery Statistics Survey that NOAA Fisheries has been conducting nationwide since 1979. The MRFSS is used to help management make informed decisions regarding the recreational fishery.

The new component of the recreational survey will include compiling and maintaining a directory of recreational fishing charter boats for all coastal states, conducting weekly telephone surveys of a random sample of the charter boat operators in each state, and conducting weekly dock-side sampling to validate the self-reported telephone data. These data will be combined with the MRFSS catch data from shore-side interviews of anglers to produce estimates of effort, catch, and participation.

“Although MRFSS estimates of shore-based and private/rental boat saltwater fishing effort have always been very reliable, estimates of fishing effort on charter boats have been relatively less precise,” said Holliday. “This is because charter boat customers are mostly from non-coastal areas, while shore and private/rental boat anglers are primarily coastal residents. The current MRFSS telephone survey concentrates on coastal areas. Therefore, we focused our efforts into developing an alternate, more efficient, yet cost-effective survey method to produce more reliable estimates for charter boat saltwater fishing effort.”

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- 2 -

The new methodology was developed and tested through five years of cooperative state/federal programs involving the Maine Department of Marine Resources, the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries, and the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission and its member state agencies from Florida through Louisiana.

“These studies have shown that a weekly charter boat-directory telephone survey produces much more accurate and precise estimates of charter boat fishing effort,” said Holliday. “The weekly telephone survey of charter boat operators will collect information on the number of trips taken, the number of anglers who fished, and the primary area fished on each trip.”

“The new method will provide us with more specific and higher quality fishing location data because it will be collected directly from the captains, instead of their customers,” said Holliday. “The new method is being implemented in the Gulf of Mexico for 2000 MRFSS estimates and we hope to implement the new methodology nationwide by 2001.”

For more information, contact Dr. David Van Voorhees or Maury Osborn at NMFS Headquarters in Silver Spring, MD (301) 713-2328.

- 30 -