

**CONSTITUENCY AWARENESS
AND UNDERSTANDING
OF THE
NATIONAL RECREATIONAL FISHERIES POLICY**



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NATIONAL RECREATIONAL FISHERIES POLICY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

GSMFC Recreational Fisheries Committee	ii
Introduction	1
Methods and Materials	1
Results	2
National Recreational Fisheries Policy	2
State and Federal Fishery Management	7
Identification of Problems	7
Government/Private Sector Partnership	7
Discussion	9
Recommendations	10
Appendix 1	12
Appendix 2	15

INTRODUCTION

During June of 1988 the National Recreational Fisheries Policy was adopted at the National Recreational Fisheries Conference and signed by 63 agencies and organizations ranging from special interest groups such as fishing organizations to Indian tribes to federal agencies. The Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (GSMFC) was among the signatories. The Policy as adopted is the culmination of a year of hard work and cooperation spearheaded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The process through which the Policy was developed was truly national in scope, involving federal agencies, state and local governments, fishing advocacy groups, and industry representatives from across the country in order to insure that the goals and objectives of the Policy represented the national interest.

Throughout the June 1988 Conference, one cautionary comment was repeated by many of the participants. That comment was "I hope that this Policy does not go the way of most other well-meaning guidance documents and end up on the shelf gathering dust." In an effort to carry the Policy through the adoption stage and into the implementation stage, the Recreational Fisheries Committee of the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission elected to initiate a project to determine the awareness and understanding of the Policy by three constituent groups consisting of fishing tournament directors, fishing and conservation organizations, and outdoor writers from across the Gulf of Mexico.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Members of the GSMFC Recreational Fisheries Committee, representing the five Gulf States marine resource management agencies, developed a mailing list of constituents from their respective states. Included in that mailing list were leaders of fishing and environmental clubs and organizations, fishing tournament directors, and media persons who specialize in fishing and outdoor activities.

A subcommittee of the Recreational Fisheries Committee developed a questionnaire (Appendix 1) which was sent to the total mailing list along with a copy of the National Recreational Fisheries Policy.

Seventy questionnaires were mailed to Texas, while 50 were mailed to Louisiana, 12 to Mississippi, 13 to Alabama, and 25 to Florida, for a total of 170 questionnaires mailed.

A letter of explanation (Appendix 2) was sent with each questionnaire in order to explain to each potential respondent the objectives of the study and its importance. One month after the questionnaire was mailed, a reminder card (Appendix 2) was sent to each person who received a questionnaire to prompt them to fill out the questionnaire and mail it back if they had not already done so.

RESULTS

The primary purpose of this questionnaire study was to ascertain the awareness and understanding by three targeted constituency groups of the National Recreational Fisheries Policy. Because fisheries resource management and fisheries and habitat problems make up a portion of the Policy, questions relative to those areas were included.

Of the 170 questionnaires which were mailed, nine were returned due to wrong addresses. Of the 161 questionnaires which reached their intended destination, 14, or 8.6%, were completed and returned.

The information obtained from the questionnaire is reported in four categories, including 1) National Recreational Fisheries Policy, 2) State and Federal Management, 3) Identification of Problems, and 4) Government/Private Partnership.

National Recreational Fisheries Policy

In general, awareness of the National Recreational Fisheries Policy (Policy) was good with at least 50% of respondents' acknowledgement of the Policy. It appeared, however, that written organizational policies are not widely used by the three constituency groups involved in the survey evidenced by only three respondents saying that they had a policy (Table 1). The responses indicate that several of the respondents have unwritten policies which address some of the goals and objectives outlined in the Policy. In some cases a personal conservation ethic was expressed as an unwritten policy (Table 1).

Table 1. Questionnaire responses and the number of respondents making each response. See Appendix 1 for questions.

QUESTION	RESPONSE	NUMBER RESPONDING
1 (Awareness of or Signatory to Policy)	Yes	7
	No	3
	Aware Only	2
	No Answer	2

2 (Understand Goals and Objectives of Policy)	Yes	12
	No	1
	No Answer	1

3 (Significance of Policy)	Conservation of Resources	4
	Recognition of the Value and Importance of Recreational Fishing	2
	Formal Acknowledgement of Need for a Policy	2
	Great Cause	1
	Not Publicized Enough	1
	Did Not Address Main Problem Which is Commercial Fishing	1
	Do Not Know	1
	No Answer	2

Table 1. (Continued)

QUESTION	RESPONSE	NUMBER RESPONDING
4 (Does Organization Have Policy)	Yes, No Description	3
	No, Intends to Develop Policy	1
	No, Might Develop Policy	1
	No, But Practice Resource Conservation	4
	No Answer	3
5 (Organization's Intent to Implement National Policy)	Yes, No Explanation	2
	No	1
	Description of Activities Ranging from Conservation to Angling Ethics to Education	6
	No Answer	5
6 (Awareness and Understanding of Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission)	Yes, With Discussion Which Indicates Understanding	2
	Yes, With Discussion Which Indicates Lack of Understanding	3
	Yes, Aware Only, No Understanding	2
	Yes, With No Explanation of Understanding	4
	No	2
	No Answer	1

Table 1. (Continued)

QUESTION	RESPONSE	NUMBER RESPONDING
7 (Awareness and Understanding of Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council)	Yes, With Discussion Which Indicates General Understanding	6
	Yes, Aware Only, No Understanding	2
	Yes, With No Explanation of Understanding	4
	No	1
	No Answer	1

8 (Awareness and Understanding of Fisheries Data Programs)	Yes, Explanations Indicated an Understanding Ranging From General to Specific	4
	Yes, Explanations Did Not Indicate an Understanding	2
	Yes, No Explanation of Understanding	5
	Not Enough Recreational Fishery Data Compared to Commercial Fishery Data	1
	No Answer	2

9 (Listing of Problems)	SEE Table 2 for Specific Responses	

Table 1. (Continued)

QUESTION	RESPONSE	NUMBER RESPONDING
10 (Communication of Organization's Concerns)		
	Public Meetings and Hearings	7
	State Membership in Wildlife Federation	1
	Cooperation with State and Federal Agencies	1
	Letters and Personal Involvement	1
	Agree with John Breaux	1
	No Answer	2

11 (How to Strengthen Partnerships)		
	Communication Between Government and Private Sector	5
	Education	3
	Better Government Awareness of Fishery Problems	2
	Better Balance Between Commercial and Recreational Representation in Agencies and Committees	2
	More Qualified Professionals	1
	Not Interested in Cooperating Until Government is Willing to Act in the Best Interest of Citizens	1

State and Federal Fishery Management

Constituency awareness of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council was somewhat higher than that for the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, with six respondents displaying an awareness and general understanding of the purpose and activities of the Council while two responded in like manner regarding the Commission (Table 1). Respondents indicated some awareness of data collection programs; however, it is difficult to determine the degree of their awareness or their understanding of the importance of and how data are used.

Identification of Problems

Of the 14 questionnaires returned, 12 responded to question nine which asked the respondent to list the seven most critical problems facing recreational fishing.

Table 2 provides a listing of 32 separate problems in marine recreational fishing identified by the 12 respondents. Three items were identified by five or more respondents. They are, in descending order, commercial overharvesting of fish with 58% agreement, habitat degradation with 50% agreement, and lack of enforcement with 42% agreement. Five issues were listed by three respondents, while three issues were listed by two respondents. The remaining 11 issues were each listed by one respondent (Table 2).

Government/Private Sector Partnership

The constituency groups surveyed are generally involved in some way in the governmental process of fishery management. Fifty-seven percent felt that communication and education could strengthen the partnership between government and the private sector (Table 1). Other suggestions to improve the partnership include better governmental awareness of fishery problems, better balance between commercial and recreational interest on agencies and committees, and more qualified management professionals (Table 1).

Table 2. Items which were identified as critical problems facing marine recreational fishing.¹

Management/Regulatory

- (7) - Commercial Overharvest
- (5) - Lack of Enforcement
- (3) - Recreational Overharvest
- (3) - Non-compliance to Regulations
- (2) - Not Enough Artificial Reefs
- (1) - Non-compatibility of Regulations Across the Gulf of Mexico
- (1) - Complexity of Laws and Regulations
- (1) - Negative Impacts of Regulations on Citizenry
- (1) - Excessive Fees for Entrance to State Parks
- (1) - Excessive Bait Shrimping
- (1) - Too Much Politics in Management
- (1) - Reactive Rather than Proactive Management
- (1) - Lack of Sociology and Economics in Management
- (1) - Lack of Data for Management

Fishing

- (3) - Longliners
- (3) - Foreign Fishermen (Including Oriental Fishermen)
- (2) - By-catch in Shrimp Fishery
- (2) - Gill Nets
- (1) - Increasing Boat Traffic
- (1) - Spearfishing
- (1) - Too Few Boat Ramps
- (1) - User Conflicts on Artificial Reefs
- (1) - Increasing Cost of Recreational Fishing

Environmental

- (6) - Habitat Degradation
- (3) - Pollution
- (1) - Natural Disasters
- (1) - Industrial and Residential Development
- (1) - Corps of Engineers

Education

- (1) - Lack of Public Education on Conservation
- (1) - Lack of Angler Ethics
- (1) - Lack of Qualified Biologists
- (1) - Lack of Public Understanding of How Quotas and Bag Limits are Set

¹ Number in parentheses indicates number of responses on each item.

DISCUSSION

Although development and adoption of the National Recreational Fisheries Policy was broad-based, involving many organizations and government agencies, implementation of such a policy can be accomplished only if the individuals who comprise the vast user group of recreational fishermen are aware of and understand the Policy. The constituency groups, comprising the recreational fishing community which participated in this study, exhibited an awareness of the existence of the Policy; however, within their groups or occupations, use of any formally acknowledged policy is limited. In most cases, responses indicated that the constituency groups are, in general terms, aware of the need of conservation of natural resources.

While the constituency groups surveyed appear to be aware of fishery management agencies, their understanding of the activities is either limited or lacking. The greater awareness and understanding of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council versus the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission might possibly be explained by the fact that the Council formulates regulations which directly impact fishermen, whereas the Commission does not have regulatory authority but makes recommendations to the states and serves as a forum for policy development. The complexity of the fishery management process, which includes state agencies, the Gulf Council, the Gulf Commission, as well as a host of research entities, is not readily apparent to the individual fishermen. The intermingling of the various management and research groups, the use of data, and the process through which management decisions are made are areas of which the resource user should become more aware, possibly through educational programs of the state and federal agencies.

There was not a great deal of agreement among respondents as to what the critical recreational fishing problems are. This lack of cohesiveness may indicate a general lack of agreement on issues or it could indicate local differences in critical issues. This fragmentation could present a problem to fishery managers because their manpower and financial resources are limited. Such a broad spectrum of problems is

difficult, if not impossible, to address, and therefore constituency satisfaction with the various management agencies' performance could be poor.

In general, responses indicate that recreational fishermen feel that marine fishery resources are stressed or overfished due to the activities of commercial fishermen. This suggests that the recreational fishing constituency needs to be made more aware of the magnitude of the recreational fishery and the harvest potential of recreational fishermen. This should be an important goal of state and federal educational programs.

One of the major themes running throughout the Policy is the need for a more effective partnership between the government agencies who manage fishery resources and the private sector who use the fishery resources. Respondents generally felt that enhanced communication and education could achieve that goal. It is important that the user constituency realize the extent of responsibility which they must assume in order to make government management agencies' programs for conservation and management of natural resources successful. It is also important for state and federal management agencies to realize that only by involving the private sector in the process of management will those programs be adhered to and understood.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This survey project represents an outreach effort of the GSMFC Recreational Fisheries Committee to make contact with and better understand the opinions and attitudes of three major constituency groups within the group of recreational fishermen. While it is gratifying to get some input from these groups, it is disturbing that only an 8.6% return rate was achieved. This may indicate that a greater degree of communication between the private and government sectors is necessary before mutually agreeable fishery conservation and management goals can be attained.

In order to allow this document to positively affect a change in the current government/private sector relationship three recommendations are offered. The first recommendation is that the GSMFC Recreational

Fisheries Committee discuss ways in which to improve and increase two-way communication between government management agencies and recreational fishery constituency groups. This effort might be enhanced by inviting several constituency group representatives to attend a committee meeting.

The second recommendation is that the GSMFC Recreational Fisheries Committee review current educational programs and discuss the most important educational needs on a state-by-state basis. This exercise could provide the individual state programs with ideas to increase their state's constituencies understanding of and participation in marine recreational fisheries management.

The final recommendation is that the GSMFC Recreational Fisheries Committee should convey to state and federal fisheries management agencies in the Gulf of Mexico region the results of this study and in particular the three issues identified as being the most critical problems in recreational fisheries management: commercial overharvest of fish, habitat degradation, and lack of adequate law enforcement.

Appendix 1

MARINE RECREATIONAL FISHERIES QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Is your organization aware of or signatory to the National Recreational Fisheries Policy?
2. Do you understand the goals and objectives of the National Recreational Fisheries Policy?
3. From your organization's perspective, what is the significance of the National Recreational Fisheries Policy?
4. Does your organization have an operative marine recreational fisheries policy? If so, please describe briefly and forward a copy for our files. If not, does your organization intend to develop a policy?
5. Does your organization intend to implement any portion or all of the National Recreational Fisheries Policy? If so, what do you intend to do and how? Please differentiate between ongoing and proposed activities. We have particular interest in research and data collection efforts and educational programs designed to inform fishermen about the need for fisheries conservation, angling ethics, catch and release fishing and fishing for underutilized species.
6. Are you aware of and what is your understanding of the activities of the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission?
7. Are you aware of and what is your understanding of the activities of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council?

8. Are you aware of and understand the purpose of any fisheries data collection programs in your state (state or federal)?

9. Please list and briefly describe the seven (7) most critical problems facing marine recreational fishing in your area. For each problem, please briefly describe any ideas you may have regarding possible solutions.

10. What efforts have you or your organization made to communicate your desires and concerns to federal and state fishery management agencies?

11. What specifically can be done to strengthen the partnership between government and private sector to attain fishery conservation goals?

(Please use as many extra sheets of paper you may need in order to adequately answer each question).

Appendix 2

Dear Colleague in Conservation,

This is to remind you to fill out the questionnaire which we sent out several weeks ago. We believe that if you participate, the results can begin to bring state/federal resource agencies and their constituent public closer together. Please help us in this effort. Also please include your name and affiliation on the questionnaire.

Sincerely,

Ronald R. Lukens
Program Coordinator
Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission