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2025 Marine Recreational Information Program Updates

February 3rd, 2026
Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission Winter Meeting

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Outline

- Fishing Effort Survey (FES) follow-up study progress update and next steps
- Recreational data collection partnership re-envisioning process - status and next steps
- Other program updates

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Fishing Effort Survey

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Background and Motivation for 2024 FES study

- Completed a **large-scale study throughout 2024** to test a revised survey design aimed at improving the accuracy and resolution/timeliness of recreational fishing effort estimates.
  - **Responding to concerns from the recreational fishing community** and partners that shore and private boat fishing effort estimates may be too high.
  - Aligning with our **commitment to continuous improvement** of recreational fishing data.

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What was tested in 2024

- Experimental design overlapped with FES from January-December 2024 (Maine to Mississippi and in Hawaii)
- **Key differences compared to current FES:**
  - **Increased frequency of administration:** The survey was mailed **monthly** instead of every two months.
  - **Revised question order:** The sequence of fishing activity questions was changed to improve reporting accuracy.
  - **Split Reference Period:** The 2-month fishing activity question was separated into two individual 1-month questions.
  - **Composite Estimation**: Combined two independent estimates for each reference month to improve precision and stability.

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FES Questionnaire

15 **How many days did this person go recreational saltwater fishing from the SHORE in <Merged State>?**

The shore includes docks, bridges, causeways, beaches, banks, or any other shore-based place or area. Do not include freshwater fishing.

☐ Did not recreational saltwater fish from shore in last 12 months → ***Go to question 16***

☐☐ Number of days saltwater shore fishing in Jan. and Feb. of 2024

☐☐☐ Number of days saltwater shore fishing in last 12 months, including Jan. and Feb.

16 **How many days did this person go recreational saltwater fishing from a private or rental BOAT that returned to shore in <Merged State>?**

Do not include freshwater trips or trips where a paid captain or crew helped locate and catch fish.

☐ Did not recreational saltwater fish from private boat in last 12 months

☐☐ Number of days saltwater boat fishing in Jan. and Feb. of 2024

☐☐☐ Number of days saltwater boat fishing in last 12 months, including Jan. and Feb.

EXP Questionnaire

15 **How many days did this person go recreational saltwater fishing from the SHORE in <Merged State>?**

The shore includes docks, bridges, causeways, beaches, banks, or any other shore-based place or area. Do not include freshwater fishing or fishing for shellfish.

☐ Did not recreational saltwater fish from shore in last 12 months → ***Go to question 16***

☐☐☐ Number of days saltwater shore fishing in last 12 months, including Jan. and Feb.

☐☐ Number of days saltwater shore fishing in Jan. of 2024

☐☐ Number of days saltwater shore fishing in Feb. of 2024

16 **How many days did this person go recreational saltwater fishing from a private or rental BOAT that returned to shore in <Merged State>?**

Do not include freshwater trips, shellfishing trips, or trips where a paid captain or crew helped locate and catch fish.

☐ Did not recreational saltwater fish from private boat in last 12 months

☐☐☐ Number of days saltwater boat fishing in last 12 months, including Jan. and Feb.

☐☐ Number of days saltwater boat fishing in Jan. of 2024

☐☐ Number of days saltwater boat fishing in Feb. of 2024

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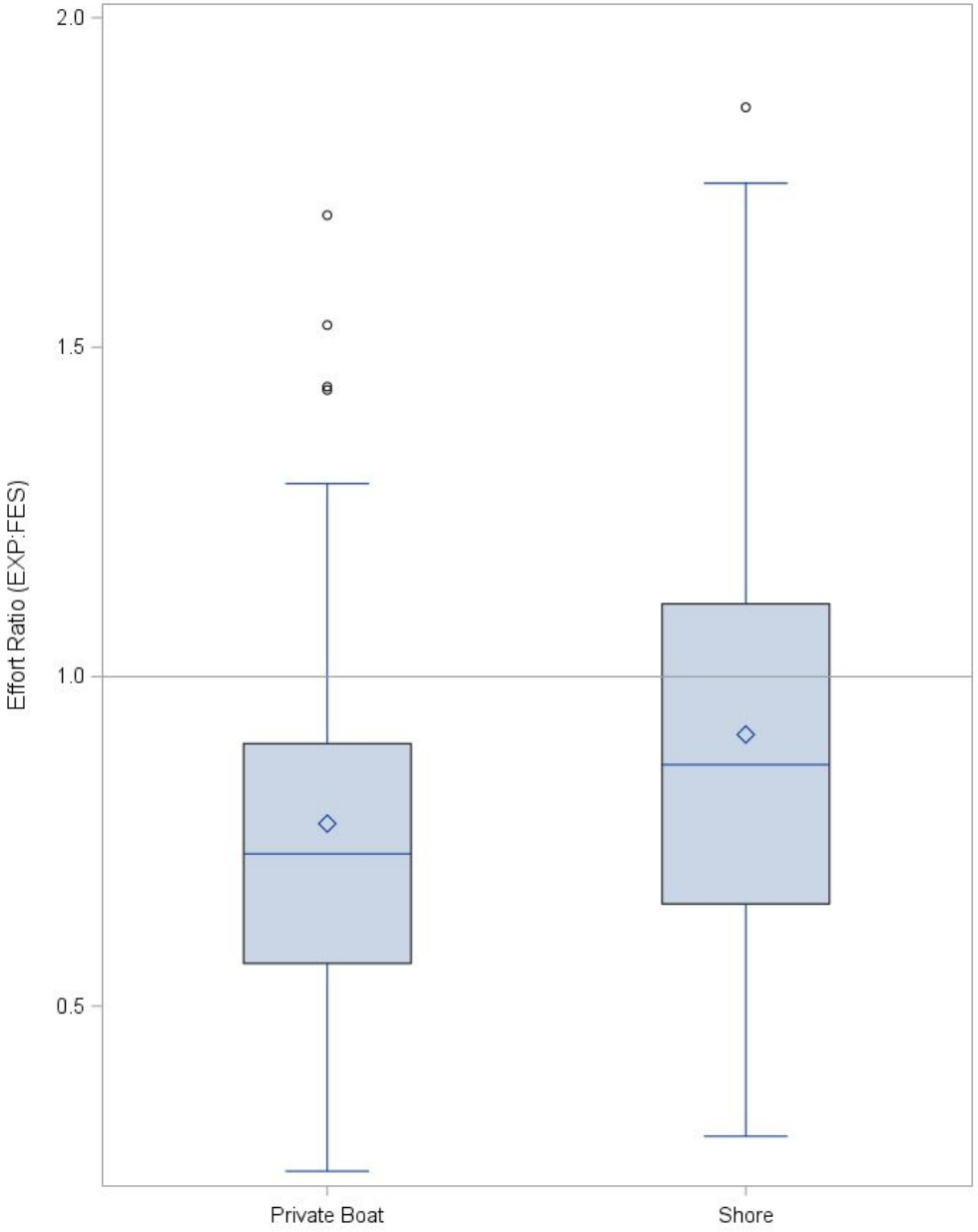
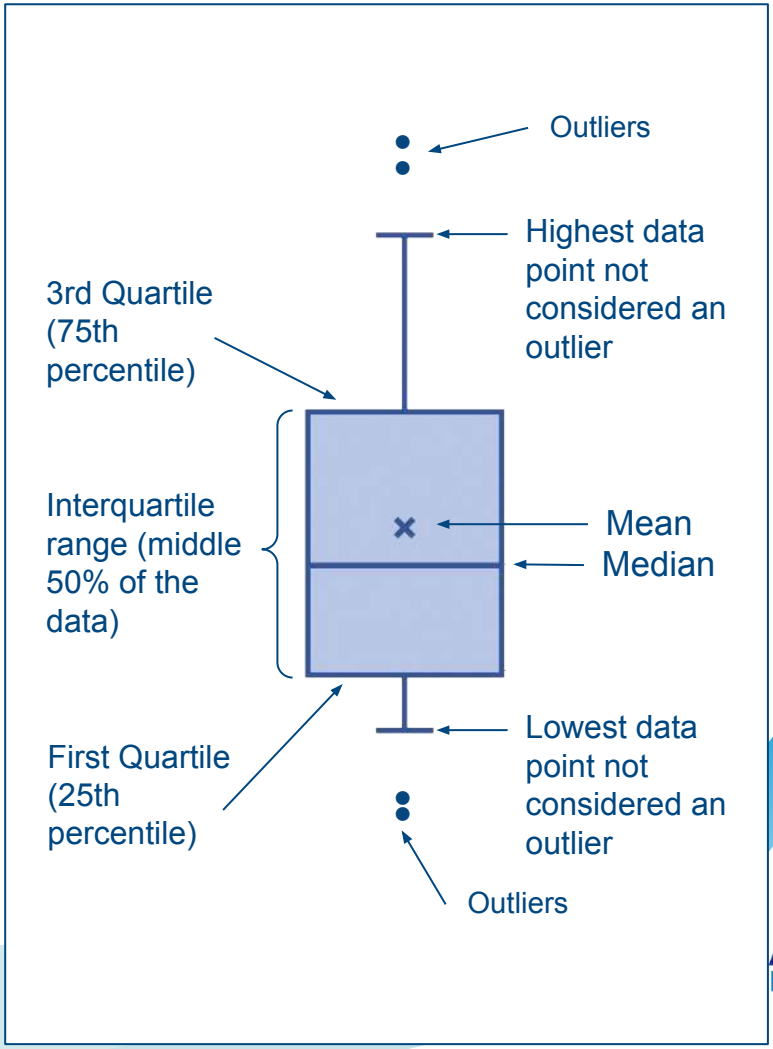
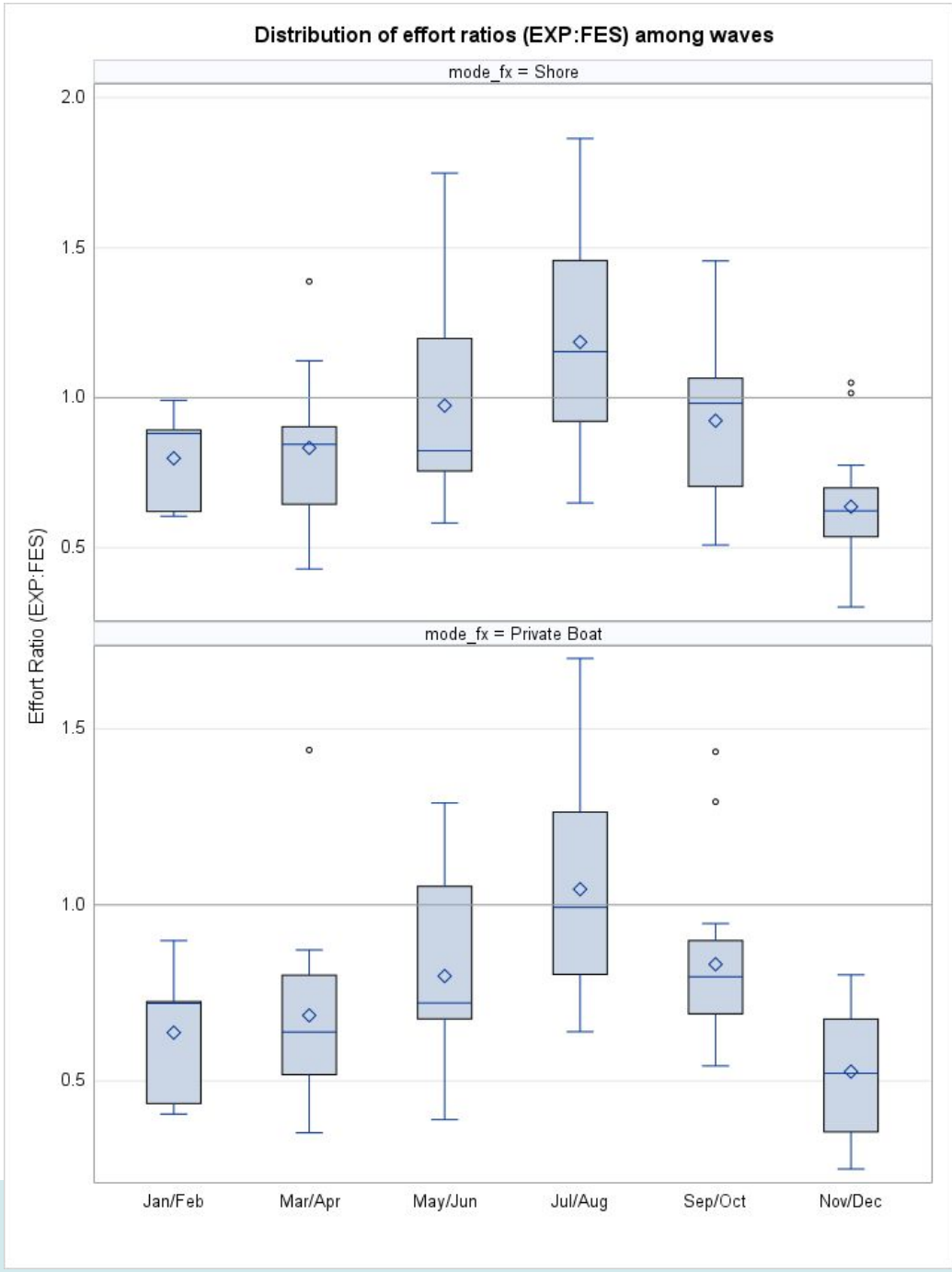


Results Overview

(preliminary - pending peer review)

Ratio <1 = experimental estimates lower than the current FES





By Wave

(preliminary - pending peer review)

Differences most pronounced during periods of lower fishing activity (e.g., Nov/Dec) and lowest during periods of high fishing activity (e.g., July/Aug).

Ratio <1 = experimental estimates lower than the current FES

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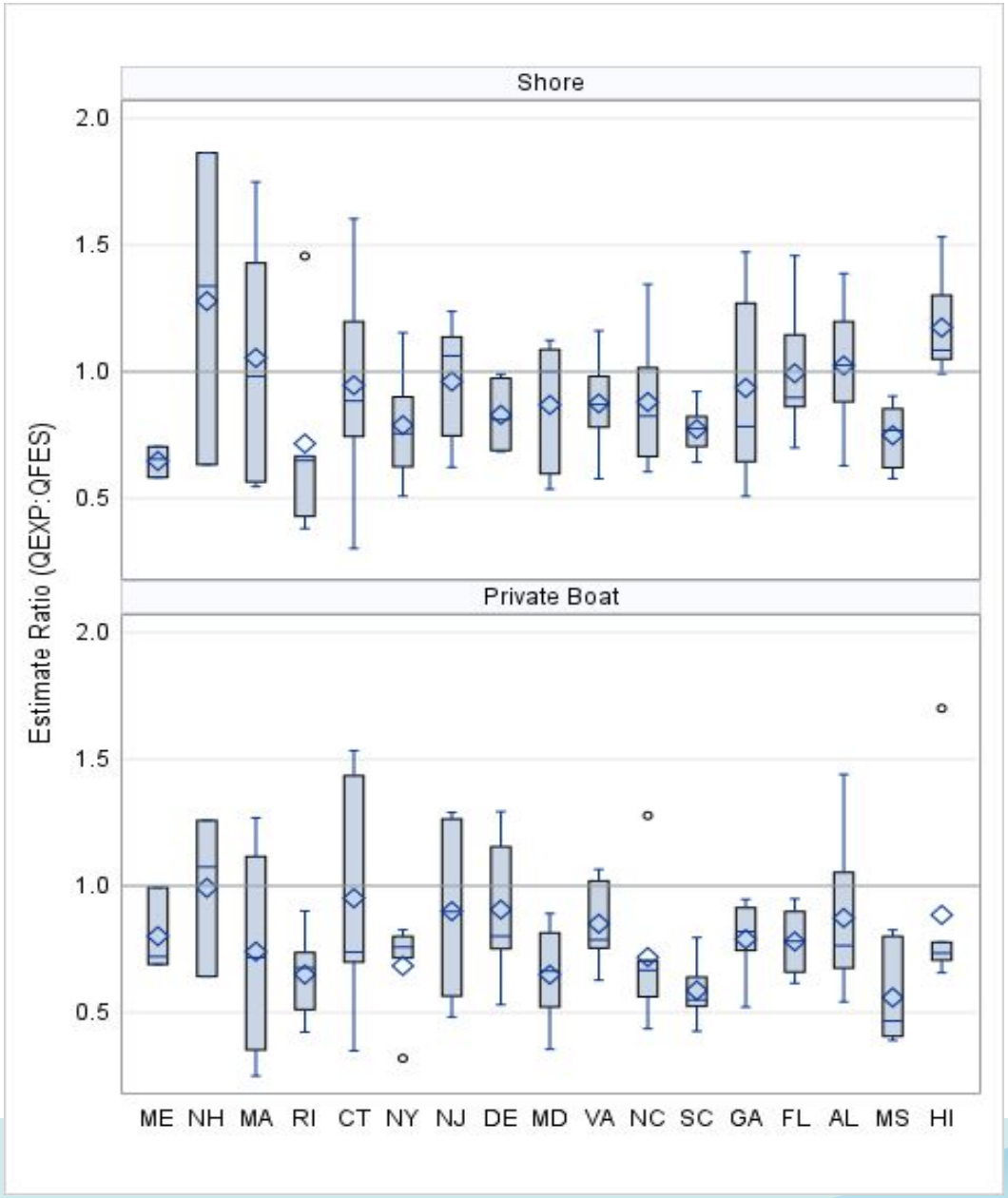
By State (preliminary - peer review in process)



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Key Findings and Conclusions

- **Experimental estimates of angler trips were generally lower** than the current FES estimates
    - Differences more pronounced in **private boat mode** and in **low activity waves**
- **Primary driver** of differences was **revised question order**
    - Created a beneficial **"bounding effect"** to mitigate overreporting
    - Allowed respondents to **identify as anglers without biasing the primary trip-count questions**
- Study demonstrates the **feasibility of monthly sampling**, as well as the benefits of the composite estimation design, including **greater precision and stability of survey estimates**
- The **revised design** tested in 2024 (revised question order and monthly sampling) **addresses** a primary source of **measurement error** in the current FES design, **improving** the **accuracy** of effort estimates

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Plans for 2026 Implementation

Rationale for implementing revised design tested in 2024

- **More Accurate Reporting:** The revised design reduces reporting error via two key mechanisms:
  - Minimizes social desirability bias by allowing respondents to identify themselves as anglers without affecting their answers about recent fishing trips.
  - Reduces telescoping where anglers might report trips outside the intended timeframe.
- **Consistent Results:**
  - The study's findings are generally consistent with 2023 pilot study report, showing lower effort estimates on average.
- **Positive angler feedback on revised questionnaire:**
  - Anglers found the revised survey to be clearer and more intuitive in cognitive interviews conducted in late 2023 (done in preparation for the 2024 study).

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Plans for 2026 Implementation (continued)

- **Calibration model development, peer review and implementation**
  - Proposed model builds on what was used for 2018 effort survey changes.
  - Open peer review workshop September 23-24, 2025
  - Revision/fine-tuning of model as needed based on peer review results and implement to rescale complete time series.
    - Note calibration results will not be a simple reflection of the 2024 study results.
- **Status of Monthly Estimate Production**
  - **Current bimonthly publication schedule will be maintained in the near-term** based on current resources.
    - Implementing the revised monthly design in 2026 provides the flexibility to produce monthly estimates in the future.
    - We are currently **analyzing resource requirements to support a shift to monthly estimate production**.

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FES Milestones

(contingent on continued available resources, peer review results and NOAA clearance timelines)

Milestone	Timeline
FES 2024 study report completed	August 2025
Peer review of FES 2024 study report and proposed design change through Center for Independent Experts	Late August→November 2025
Calibration model peer review workshop (also through CIE); open virtual meeting with partner and public comment components.	Sept 23-24, 2025 (Workshop) Dec 2025/Jan 2026 (Final Peer Review Reports)
Transition plan development and partner review	July→December, 2025
MRIP Transition Team meeting with Atlantic, Gulf, and Hawai'i subgroups (includes NMFS, state, commission, and council representation) to review partner input on transition plan for effectively implementing the revised FES	Sept. 29, 2025
Peer reviewed study report, final peer-reviewed calibration methodology, and transition plan released	Jan/Feb 2026
Implement revised FES design	Jan 2026
Calibrated time series available for use in assessment/management	**Original: Spring 2026** **Revised target following gov. shutdown: Under active review**

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Partnership Re-envisioning

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Initiative to Re-envision the Recreational Fishing Data Partnership (2024-present)

Working Goal

A state-federal data collection system for marine and estuarine recreational fisheries that is regionally specific and nationally coherent and leverages partner expertise and resources to obtain the best quality data possible from available sources to inform sustainable, adaptive fisheries management

Progress To-Date (Spring 2024–Summer 2025):

- Engaged over 150 partners through initial briefings
- Conducted internal interviews with 40+ NMFS regional office and science center staff across all regions
- 15+ regional partner and public listening sessions nationwide
- Produced a framework report synthesizing all gathered input.
- Sent draft report to partners for review - received 200+ follow-up comments that were incorporated into the final framework report.

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High-level priorities as identified by data users, partners and the public

National:

1. Improve accuracy, precision, timeliness of catch & effort estimates
2. Improve biological data collection
3. Determine suitable ways to integrate non-probability (e.g., app-based) data into management
4. Ensure consistent, centralized, accessible data warehousing & standards
5. Develop adaptive management frameworks that account for data limitations*

*outside the scope of rec. data collection—underscores management approaches must evolve in tandem with data

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Re-envisioning the Recreational Fishing Data Partnership - Status

- **Original vision for 2025-2026:** Regional workgroups, shared leadership, in-person regional workshops, updated partnership model by 2026.
  - Pivoted focus to **targeted national and regional improvements** guided by the framework report due to changes in operating conditions.
- **Upcoming:** Announce and publish the framework report (pending NOAA clearance) and work with partners on implementing targeted improvements.

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Other Program Updates

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Peer review of NMFS Recreational Fishing Survey and Data Standards

Our national survey and data standards are intended to:

- Serve as guidelines on core aspects of recreational fisheries data collection and estimation.
- Promote **data quality, consistency, and comparability** across state, regional, and federal recreational fishing surveys, as well as **shared use of the resulting data**

The **National Academies have** been conducting an independent review assessing the standards' **effectiveness for key data uses**, alignment with **federal best practices**.

Jan 2026: Will publish their report with **recommendations for improvement**, including e.g., potential guidance related to Artificial Intelligence/modeling approaches and integration of non-probability data (relevant to New England re-envisioning priority #2).

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Image: Massachusetts Office of Tourism/Flickr

New Partner Review Procedures for Recreational Catch Estimates

Strengthened Review Process: NOAA Fisheries, in collaboration with the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program and all Atlantic States, has launched a more robust procedure for reviewing recreational fishing catch and effort estimates.

Collaborative Approach: The new process leverages the local expertise of state partners to identify inconsistencies and improve the quality of data used for fisheries management.

Positive Feedback: State partners have responded positively, noting a greater sense of ownership in data review.

Forthcoming Tool: A new online data review tracking tool is in development to increase transparency and efficiency (contingent on resourcing)..

More information: NOAA Fisheries, Partners Collaborate to Strengthen Review of Recreational Catch Estimates

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Image: Massachusetts Office of Tourism/Flickr

Questions?

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