



Message From the Under Secretary

September 2, 2009

Improving Engagement with the Recreational Fishing Community

Saltwater recreational fishing is among the most popular outdoor sports in America with anglers representing one of NOAA's largest organized constituencies. Not only are anglers stewards of our ocean, they contribute greatly to the economic vitality of our coastal communities. For these reasons, I believe it is in NOAA's best interests to adopt policies and practices that will protect ocean ecosystems and ensure one of America's most treasured pastimes endures for future generations.

NOAA is entrusted with ensuring the long-term sustainability and use of America's living marine resources. Our policies are framed by congressional mandates and the president's priorities and based on sound science. We take a comprehensive, ecosystem-based approach to management and we strive to work in partnership with our natural allies: those who use and enjoy living marine resources.

Since becoming NOAA Administrator, it has become obvious to me that although NOAA and recreational anglers should be allies in ecosystem management, we are all too frequently at odds over policy and process. Following a number of conversations with members of the recreational fishing industry and media, it is clear that while we have a lot of common interests and goals, we have some long-standing issues that get in the way of a more productive partnership. Strengthening our relationship will require sustained interaction built on a solid foundation of trust and respect. In short, we need to have more and better conversations.

To that end, I'm announcing my commitment to take a fresh look at our relationship with the angling community. As a first step, I will create a new position of senior policy advisor for recreational fishing that will report directly to the assistant administrator for NOAA Fisheries and be charged with addressing the interests of the recreational community within the agency as we consider policy. The advisor will help coordinate recreational fisheries policy. In addition, the position will facilitate dialogue with recreational fishermen to better understand the options that exist to improve support for recreational fishing. NOAA Fisheries will also identify coordinators within each regional office and science center and appropriate headquarters offices to work closely with the advisor. The goal is to ensure that there is a network of knowledgeable staff and resources within NOAA Fisheries that is focused on recreational fishing issues. Additionally, I intend to task Andrew Winer, NOAA's new director of external affairs, to work closely with NOAA Fisheries on recreational fishing issues.

As a first task, the advisor will coordinate, in cooperation with the angling community, a recreational fishing summit to identify issues of concern and possible solutions. This national meeting will be followed by a series of joint problem-solving roundtables to identify roadblocks to an improved relationship and to design reasonable solutions. Suggested specific topics include data and resources needed to incorporate the economic value of recreational fishing into NOAA's information and reports, recreational fish habitat considerations, a review of NOAA's implementation of the Magnuson-Stevens requirements for closure of areas to fishing, expectations for NOAA's new Marine Recreational Information Program, marine spatial planning, catch shares, NOAA's strategic plans and the role of recreational fisheries, and how NOAA Fisheries can focus personnel and financial resources on the recreational sector. No issue will be off limits. However, the end product must be a practical improvement or series of improvements that are reasonable and useful. Additionally, we will task NOAA's Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee to organize and provide authoritative and comprehensive national policy advice from marine recreational stakeholders.

This process is intended to significantly improve NOAA's ability to work productively with the recreational fishing community while managing all fisheries sustainably.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jane Lubchenco". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J".

Dr. Jane Lubchenco
Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere and NOAA Administrator