

119TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 5699

To require the Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to reform the Marine Recreational Information Program of the National Marine Fisheries Service, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

OCTOBER 6, 2025

Mr. RUTHERFORD introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Natural Resources

A BILL

To require the Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to reform the Marine Recreational Information Program of the National Marine Fisheries Service, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Fisheries Data Mod-
5 ernization and Accuracy Act of 2025”.

6 **SEC. 2. DEFINITIONS.**

7 In this Act:

1 (1) ADMINISTRATOR.—The term “Adminis-
2 trator” means the Administrator of the National
3 Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, acting
4 through the Director of the National Marine Fish-
5 eries Service.

6 (2) FISHERY.—The term “fishery” has the
7 meaning given the term in section 3 of the Magnu-
8 son-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management
9 Act (16 U.S.C. 1802).

10 (3) INDEPENDENT ENTITY.—The term “inde-
11 pendent entity”—

12 (A) means an entity that—

13 (i) is not a unit of the National Oce-
14 anic and Atmospheric Administration; and

15 (ii) has expertise in areas of science
16 related to fishery stock assessments; and

17 (B) includes—

18 (i) the National Academies of
19 Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine; and

20 (ii) an institution of higher education
21 (as such term is defined in section 101 of
22 the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20
23 U.S.C. 1001)).

1 (4) MRIP.—The term “MRIP” means the Ma-
2 rine Recreational Information Program of the Na-
3 tional Marine Fisheries Service.

4 (5) NATIONAL ACADEMIES.—The term “Na-
5 tional Academies” means the National Academies of
6 Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine.

7 (6) PSE.—The term “PSE” means the percent
8 standard error.

9 (7) PULSE SPECIES.—The term “pulse species”
10 means a species that, due to regulatory constraints
11 or the movement or availability of the species on a
12 seasonal basis—

13 (A) is caught—

14 (i) on an intermittent or infrequent
15 basis; or

16 (ii) only during an abbreviated time-
17 frame; and

18 (B) is likely not sampled in a representa-
19 tive manner by data collected through the
20 MRIP.

21 (8) REGIONAL FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUN-
22 CIL.—The term “Regional Fishery Management
23 Council” means a Regional Fishery Management
24 Council established under section 302 of the Magnu-

son-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (16 U.S.C. 1852).

(9) REGIONAL STATE FISHERIES COMMISSION.—The term “regional State fisheries commission” means each of—

(A) the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission;

(B) the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission; and

(C) the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission.

(10) SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE.—The term “scientific and statistical committee” means a scientific and statistical committee established pursuant to section 302(g) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (16 U.S.C. 1852(g)).

(11) SEASONAL FISHERY.—The term “seasonal fishery” means a fishery—

(A) that is subject to an annual closed season; or

(B) that may be affected by in- or post-season accountability measures that result in fishing or harvest closures.

1 (12) STANDING COMMITTEE.—The term
2 “standing committee” means the standing com-
3 mittee established pursuant to section 3(b)(1).

4 (13) STOCK OF FISH.—The term “stock of
5 fish” has the meaning given the term in section 3
6 of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and
7 Management Act (16 U.S.C. 1802).

8 (14) WAVE.—The term “wave” means the
9 shortest period in which MRIP data are aggregated
10 and reported for use in management decisions.

11 **SEC. 3. RECREATIONAL FISHING DATA COLLECTION RE-**
12 **FORM.**

13 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator shall reform
14 the MRIP in effect as of the date of the enactment of
15 this section to meet the unique needs of individual regions
16 and States, taking into consideration the needs of State-
17 level programs related to recreational fishing catch and
18 effort surveys in effect as of the date of the enactment
19 of this section to ensure that such reform does not unnec-
20 essarily dilute the effectiveness of such programs.

21 (b) NATIONAL ACADEMIES.—

22 (1) STANDING COMMITTEE.—

23 (A) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator
24 shall enter into an agreement with the National
25 Academies to establish a standing committee

1 within the National Academies that shall meet
2 regularly to discuss issues related to rec-
3 reational fisheries data collection and manage-
4 ment.

5 (B) INDEPENDENCE.—In carrying out this
6 subsection, the standing committee shall oper-
7 ate independently and without the influence of
8 the Administrator.

9 (C) COMPOSITION.—The standing com-
10 mittee shall include individuals who are experts
11 in recreational fisheries data collection and
12 management, including representatives from
13 State fish and wildlife agencies.

14 (2) CONSULTATION REGARDING PSE.—

15 (A) IN GENERAL.—If the PSE for data
16 collected through the MRIP for a given sea-
17 sonal fishery reaches or exceeds 30 percent in
18 a given wave, or if a State submits a petition
19 with respect to a given seasonal fishery under
20 paragraph (4), the Administrator shall consult
21 with the standing committee regarding op-
22 tions—

23 (i) to reduce the PSE of such sea-
24 sonal fishery; or

(ii) if reducing the PSE of such seasonal fishery is not practicable, to adjust the management of such seasonal fishery, including by using—

(I) the management approaches described in section 302(h)(8) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (16 U.S.C. 1852(h)(8)); or

(II) multi-year annual catch limits, including block average annual catch limits of up to 3 years.

(B) REPORT.—After the Administrator consults with the standing committee under subparagraph (A) with respect to a seasonal fishery described in that subparagraph, the Administrator shall, not later than 6 months after the date on which either the PSE for data collected through the MRIP for such seasonal fishery exceeds 30 percent in a given wave or the Administrator receives a petition submitted by a State under paragraph (4), publish a report specifying—

(i) the options considered under that subparagraph (A);

1 (ii) the recommendation of the Ad-
2 ministrator regarding how—

3 (I) to reduce the PSE for data
4 collected through the MRIP for such
5 seasonal fishery; or

6 (II) to adjust the management of
7 such seasonal fishery in a manner
8 that allows continued access and con-
9 siders recommendations contained in
10 the report submitted to Congress
11 under section 102 of the Modernizing
12 Recreational Fisheries Management
13 Act of 2018 (Public Law 115–405);
14 and

15 (iii) the reasoning, written in a man-
16 ner easily understood by the public, for
17 giving such recommendation.

18 (C) REGIONAL FISHERY MANAGEMENT
19 COUNCIL.—If the Administrator publishes a re-
20 port under subparagraph (B) with respect to a
21 seasonal fishery described in subparagraph (A),
22 the Administrator shall send such report to the
23 relevant Regional Fishery Management Council
24 for consideration.

1 (3) CONSIDERATION.—In carrying out para-
2 graphs (1) and (2), the Administrator and the
3 standing committee shall consider issues including
4 the following:

5 (A) Whether the data collected through the
6 MRIP is appropriate and useful for manage-
7 ment decisions, including options to improve
8 data collection methods.

9 (B) The extent to which existing and po-
10 tential data collection options are—

11 (i) burdensome to anglers; and

12 (ii) an efficient or appropriate use of
13 resources.

14 (C) Whether and to what extent specific
15 recommendations from the report published by
16 the National Academies titled “Data and Man-
17 agement Strategies for Recreational Fisheries
18 with Annual Catch Limits” (2021) and other
19 relevant National Academies activities can and
20 should be applied in light of the particular con-
21 text of the fishery being considered.

22 (4) PETITION TO INITIATE CONSULTATION.—A
23 State may submit to the Administrator a petition for
24 the Administrator to initiate the consultation process

1 under paragraph (2) with respect to a given seasonal
2 fishery if—

3 (A) the PSE for data collected through the
4 MRIP for such seasonal fishery is—

5 (i) significantly greater or less than
6 the preceding 3-year average PSE for such
7 seasonal fishery; or

8 (ii) substantially greater than the
9 PSE for data collected through State sur-
10 veys for such seasonal fishery; or

11 (B) data collected through the MRIP for
12 such seasonal fishery is unreliable because the
13 stock of fish of such seasonal fishery is a pulse
14 species.

15 (5) COMBINED REPORTS.—In carrying out this
16 subsection, the Administrator may carry out a single
17 consultation with the standing committee under
18 paragraph (2) with respect to 2 or more species if
19 the Administrator and the standing committee joint-
20 ly determine the underlying issues that triggered the
21 consultation are highly similar.

22 (c) ALTERNATIVE TO MRIP.—If, after consultation
23 with the standing committee and relevant States, the Ad-
24 ministrator determines that it is not practicable to reduce
25 the PSE for data collected through the MRIP for a given

1 seasonal fishery to 30 percent or less, the Administrator,
 2 in collaboration with the standing committee and relevant
 3 States and stakeholders, may develop alternative data col-
 4 lection and monitoring methodologies and, subject to peer
 5 review and validation, use such alternative data collection
 6 and monitoring methodologies in place of the MRIP for
 7 such seasonal fishery.

8 (d) **RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.**—Nothing in this sec-
 9 tion may be construed to override the role of the scientific
 10 and statistical committees in advising the Regional Fish-
 11 ery Management Councils regarding recommendations de-
 12 veloped pursuant to this section.

13 **SEC. 4. STATE RECREATIONAL FISHERY CATCH AND EF-**
 14 **FORT DATA COLLECTION.**

15 (a) **STATE RECREATIONAL FISHERY CATCH AND EF-**
 16 **FORT DATA COLLECTION PROGRAM.**—

17 (1) **IN GENERAL.**—A State may, subject to the
 18 approval of the Administrator, carry out a program
 19 within the waters of such State and Federal waters
 20 to collect recreational fishing catch and effort data
 21 for individual, or sets of, species that are federally
 22 managed.

23 (2) **REQUIREMENTS.**—If a State carries out a
 24 program under paragraph (1), the head of such pro-
 25 gram shall—

1 (A) ensure that such program complies
2 with paragraph (3);

3 (B) collect recreational fishery catch and
4 effort data with respect to such State;

5 (C) report such data that is necessary for
6 Federal management to the Administrator in a
7 manner and timeliness that complies with sec-
8 tion 401 of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Con-
9 servation and Management Act (16 U.S.C.
10 1881); and

11 (D) take into consideration the burden of
12 such program to the average angler such that
13 such program is not overly burdensome to the
14 point that substantial noncompliance would be
15 expected.

16 (3) DATA REQUIREMENTS.—The Administrator,
17 in consultation with the regional State fisheries com-
18 missions, shall, with respect to data collected
19 through a recreational fishery catch and effort data
20 collection program of a State carried out under this
21 subsection—

22 (A) establish universal standards regarding
23 the collection of such data, including ensuring
24 that such standards—

1 (i) allow for flexibility in the design of
2 such programs to account for differences
3 in recreational fishing activity between
4 States; and

5 (ii) facilitate the collection of com-
6 parable data between States within a re-
7 gion for the purposes of stock assessments
8 and management; and

9 (B) not later than 3 years after the date
10 on which a State first reports such data, de-
11 velop and implement a plan to use such data—

12 (i) without calibration to data col-
13 lected pursuant to any Federal program,
14 including the MRIP; and

15 (ii) as the baseline for the calibration
16 of historic estimates of recreational catch
17 in place of data collected through the
18 MRIP.

19 (4) USE OF STATE DATA.—

20 (A) IN FEDERAL STOCK ASSESSMENTS AND
21 REGULATORY ACTIONS.—Data collected through
22 a recreational fishery catch and effort data col-
23 lection program of a State carried out under
24 this subsection may be used in Federal stock
25 assessments and regulatory actions.

1 (B) IN PLACE OF MRIP DATA.—If a State
2 collects data pursuant to this subsection that is
3 collected pursuant to the MRIP, the Adminis-
4 trator shall use the data collected by the State
5 in place of the data collected pursuant to the
6 MRIP, including with respect to management
7 decisions.

8 (C) CALIBRATION WITH MRIP DATA.—

9 (i) IN GENERAL.—As applicable, data
10 collected through the MRIP—

11 (I) shall be calibrated to data col-
12 lected through a recreational fishery
13 catch and effort data collection pro-
14 gram of a State carried out under this
15 subsection; and

16 (II) may only be so calibrated
17 after the data described in subclause
18 (I) is compared to data collected
19 through such a program of another
20 State.

21 (ii) PROHIBITION.—Data collected
22 through a recreational fishery catch and
23 effort data collection program of a State
24 carried out under this subsection may not

1 be calibrated to data collected through the
2 MRIP.

3 (5) SUBSEQUENT FUNDING.—Upon approval by
4 the Administrator of a recreational fishery catch and
5 effort data collection program of a State under para-
6 graph (1), funding previously allocated to such State
7 for the collection of recreational fishery catch and ef-
8 fort data through the MRIP shall continue to be al-
9 located to such State for such State to carry out
10 such program of the State.

11 (b) GRANT PROGRAM.—

12 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days
13 after the date of the enactment of this section, the
14 Administrator shall establish and carry out a grant
15 program to award amounts to States to develop,
16 with respect to each such State, a new, or improve
17 an existing, program described in subsection (a).

18 (2) APPLICATIONS.—To be eligible for a grant
19 under this subsection, a State shall submit to the
20 Administrator an application in such form, at such
21 time, and containing such information as the Admin-
22 istrator determines appropriate.

23 (3) USE OF FUNDS.—A State that is awarded
24 a grant under this subsection shall use such
25 award—

1 (A) to support the development or im-
2 provement of a program described in subsection
3 (a) of such State;

4 (B) to enhance the timeliness of reporting
5 by such State of data collected by such State
6 through such program; and

7 (C) to increase the accuracy and precision
8 of the data collected by such State pursuant to
9 such program.

10 (4) PRIORITY.—In awarding grants under this
11 subsection, the Administrator shall give priority to
12 applications—

13 (A) based on the ability of the award to re-
14 duce the uncertainty of data collected through
15 the MRIP, including with respect to—

16 (i) economically or socially important
17 species;

18 (ii) species a fishery of which has had
19 a fishing season substantially reduced or
20 full annual closures proposed; and

21 (iii) species a fishery of which is at
22 risk of closing another fishery because the
23 management of both fisheries are inter-
24 mingled; and

1 (B) that would alter or improve an existing
2 State program carried out under subsection (a)
3 to meet the requirements under subsection
4 (a)(3).

5 (c) REPORT.—On the date that is 2 years after the
6 date of the enactment of this section, and biennially there-
7 after, the Administrator shall submit to the appropriate
8 congressional committees and make publicly available a re-
9 port regarding the implementation of this section that in-
10 cludes—

11 (1) the number of States that have participated
12 in the grant program established under subsection
13 (b);

14 (2) a description of each State recreational fish-
15 ery catch and effort data collection program;

16 (3) a description of how the Administrator in-
17 corporates data collected pursuant to each such pro-
18 gram in fishery stock assessments, fishery manage-
19 ment decisions, and catch monitoring; and

20 (4) an analysis regarding the improvement in
21 data precision and the accuracy of data collected
22 pursuant to each such program compared to data
23 collected through the MRIP.

24 (d) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—Nothing in this sec-
25 tion may be construed to negate, uncertify, or otherwise

1 undo existing State programs to collect recreational fish-
 2 ing catch and effort data.

3 (e) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is
 4 authorized to be appropriated to the Administrator to
 5 carry out this section \$15,000,000 for each of fiscal years
 6 2026 through 2031.

7 **SEC. 5. HEALTHY FISHERIES THROUGH BETTER SCIENCE.**

8 (a) DEFINITION OF STOCK ASSESSMENT.—Section 3
 9 of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Man-
 10 agement Act (16 U.S.C. 1802) is amended—

11 (1) by redesignating paragraphs (43) through
 12 (50) as paragraphs (44) through (51), respectively;

13 (2) by inserting after paragraph (42) the fol-
 14 lowing:

15 “(43) The term ‘stock assessment’ means an
 16 evaluation of the past, present, and future status of
 17 a stock of fish, including—

18 “(A) a range of life history characteristics
 19 for such stock of fish, including, to the extent
 20 practicable—

21 “(i) the geographical boundaries of
 22 such stock of fish; and

23 “(ii) information regarding age,
 24 growth, natural mortality, sexual maturity

1 and reproduction, feeding habits, and habi-
2 tat preferences of such stock of fish; and
3 “(B) fishing for the stock of fish.”; and
4 (3) by redesignating the second paragraph (33)
5 as paragraph (52).

6 (b) STOCK ASSESSMENT PLAN.—

7 (1) IN GENERAL.—Section 404 of the Magnu-
8 son-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management
9 Act (16 U.S.C. 1881c) is amended by adding at the
10 end the following:

11 “(f) STOCK ASSESSMENT PLAN.—

12 “(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall develop
13 and publish in the Federal Register, on the same
14 schedule as required for each strategic plan required
15 under subsection (b), a plan to conduct stock assess-
16 ments for priority stocks of fish for which a fishery
17 management plan is in effect under this Act.

18 “(2) CONTENTS.—Each plan described in para-
19 graph (1) shall—

20 “(A) for each priority stock of fish for
21 which a stock assessment has previously been
22 conducted—

23 “(i) establish a schedule for updating
24 the stock assessment that is reasonable

1 given the biology and characteristics of the
2 stock of fish; and

3 “(ii) subject to the availability of ap-
4 propriations, require completion of a new
5 stock assessment, or an update of the most
6 recent stock assessment—

7 “(I) every 5 years; or

8 “(II) within such other time pe-
9 riod specified and justified by the Sec-
10 retary in the plan;

11 “(B) for each priority stock of fish for
12 which a stock assessment has not previously
13 been conducted—

14 “(i) establish a schedule for con-
15 ducting an initial stock assessment that is
16 reasonable given the biology and character-
17 istics of the stock; and

18 “(ii) subject to the availability of ap-
19 propriations, require completion of the ini-
20 tial stock assessment not later than 3
21 years after the date on which the plan is
22 published in the Federal Register unless
23 another time period is specified and justi-
24 fied by the Secretary in the plan; and

“(C)(i) identify data and analysis, including both data and analysis that is and is not available at the time the plan is prepared, that would reduce the uncertainty, improve the accuracy, and increase the efficiency of future stock assessments; and

“(ii) with respect to data and analysis identified under clause (i), determine whether such data and analysis could be provided by fishermen, fishing communities, universities, and research institutions, to the extent that the use of such data would be consistent with the requirements in section 301(a)(2).

“(3) WAIVER OF STOCK ASSESSMENT REQUIREMENT.—Notwithstanding subparagraphs (A)(ii) and (B)(ii) of paragraph (2), a stock assessment is not required for a stock of fish in the plan described in paragraph (1) if the Secretary determines that such stock assessment is not necessary and justifies such determination in the Federal Register notice required by this subsection.”.

(2) DEADLINE.—Notwithstanding section 404(f)(1) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (16 U.S.C. 1881c(f)(1)), as added by this section, the Secretary

1 of Commerce shall issue the first stock assessment
2 plan under section 404(f) of the Magnuson-Stevens
3 Fishery Conservation and Management Act (16
4 U.S.C. 1881c(f)), as added by this section, not later
5 than 2 years after the date of the enactment of this
6 section.

7 **SEC. 6. FISHERY-INDEPENDENT SURVEYS BY INDE-**
8 **PENDENT ENTITIES.**

9 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator shall establish
10 a program to enter into contracts with independent enti-
11 ties on a competitive basis under which such independent
12 entities shall conduct fishery-independent surveys de-
13 signed to estimate the absolute abundance of stocks of fish
14 included in the Fish Stock Sustainability Index on behalf
15 of the Administrator.

16 (b) APPLICATIONS.—To be eligible to enter into a
17 contract under the program established under subsection
18 (a), an independent entity shall submit to the Adminis-
19 trator an application in such form, at such time, and con-
20 taining such information as the Administrator determines
21 appropriate, including evidence of the following:

22 (1) Use by the independent entity of modern or
23 cutting-edge science.

24 (2) The ability of the independent entity to
25 handle data in a reliable manner.

1 (c) USE OF DATA.—Upon favorable peer review, the
2 Administrator, in consultation with the relevant scientific
3 and statistical committees and independent entity and
4 with consideration of the report submitted under section
5 7, shall incorporate data collected pursuant to a fishery-
6 independent abundance survey conducted by an inde-
7 pendent entity under the program established under sub-
8 section (a) in management decisions.

9 (d) REPORT.—The Administrator shall annually sub-
10 mit to the Committee on Natural Resources of the House
11 of Representatives and the Committee on Commerce,
12 Science, and Transportation of the Senate a report re-
13 garding the findings of surveys conducted pursuant to this
14 section and the incorporation of the results of such surveys
15 in management decisions pursuant to subsection (c).

16 **SEC. 7. REPORT.**

17 Not later than 1 year after the date of the enactment
18 of this section, the National Academies, in consultation
19 with the Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico
20 Studies, shall submit to the Committee on Natural Re-
21 sources of the House of Representatives and the Com-
22 mittee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the
23 Senate and make publicly available a report regarding—

24 (1) the incorporation of the results of the study
25 titled “Estimating the Absolute Abundance of Age-

1 2+ Red Snapper (*Lutjanus campechanus*) in the
 2 U.S. Gulf of Mexico” (August 16, 2021) in manage-
 3 ment decisions of the National Marine Fisheries
 4 Service; and

5 (2) recommendations regarding the incorpora-
 6 tion of data collected pursuant to section 6 in man-
 7 agement decisions of the National Marine Fisheries
 8 Service.

9 **SEC. 8. TRANSPARENCY AND PUBLIC PROCESS.**

10 (a) **ADVICE.**—Section 302(g)(1)(B) of the Magnuson-
 11 Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (16
 12 U.S.C. 1852(g)(1)(B)) is amended by adding at the end
 13 the following: “Each scientific and statistical committee
 14 shall develop such advice in a transparent manner and
 15 allow for public involvement in the process.”.

16 (b) **MEETINGS.**—Section 302(i)(2) of the Magnuson-
 17 Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (16
 18 U.S.C. 1852(i)(2)) is amended by adding at the end the
 19 following:

20 “(G) Each Council shall make available on the
 21 internet website of the Council—

22 “(i) with respect to each meeting of the
 23 Council and Council coordination committee es-
 24 tablished under subsection (l) that is not closed
 25 in accordance with paragraph (3), to the extent

1 practicable, a Webcast, live audio recording, or
2 live broadcast of each such meeting; and

3 “(ii) with respect to each meeting of the
4 Council and of the scientific and statistical
5 committee established by the Council under
6 subsection (g)(1)(A) that is not closed in ac-
7 cordance with paragraph (3), by not later than
8 30 days after the conclusion of each such meet-
9 ing, an audio or video (if the meeting was held
10 in person or by video conference) recording or
11 a searchable audio or written transcript of each
12 such meeting.

13 “(H) The Secretary shall maintain and make
14 available to the public an archive of each recording
15 and transcript made available under subparagraph
16 (G).”.

○