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*Chairman—Ogden M. Phipps, Commissioner,
Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish
Commission, Miami Beach, Florida*

The National Marine Fisheries Service Recreational Fisheries Program

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Recreational fishing in saltwater without question is one of the most important recreational activities in this country. The Fishing and Hunting Survey conducted as part of the 1970 Census indicated that nearly 10 million people participated in this activity. A recreational fisheries statistics program we now have going in the northeast provides evidence that participants of all ages in recreational saltwater fishing and shellfish activities will number over 10 million in that region alone. Participants nationwide will certainly well exceed 20 million people.

This is my first opportunity to speak with you, the leaders in the marine recreational fisheries field. I particularly welcome this opportunity to discuss with you the National Marine Fisheries program, what it has been, and my views about what it should be and where it should be going.

The need for conscientious management of our marine fisheries resources has increased dramatically over the past couple of decades. This need for management has been brought about by increase in use by our commercial and recreational fisheries and, in some cases, competition from foreign fishing fleets as well. We face some critical problems in the years ahead. Ignoring these problems won't make them go away and burying our heads in the sand won't solve them. They can only be solved by facing up to them squarely, now.

We face a variety of problems. For example, we may be harvesting some of our species beyond the optimum yield level. A couple of examples that come to mind are barracuda stocks along the west coast and Atlantic bluefin tuna. Harvest rates must be brought into balance with the supply. This is not to say that I favor preserving some fish species just for the sake of preserving them. Conservation in my book means wise use, and to accomplish the long-term wise use of these resources will take the combined talent, knowledge and wisdom of all of us. I mentioned Atlantic bluefin tuna as one of the species for which the combined commercial and recreational harvest may be beyond the optimum

level. We now have a scientific investigation underway and the next speaker, Dr. Grant Beardsley, will discuss this study in detail.

One of our greatest needs in marine recreational fisheries management is a much better knowledge of how many people participate in saltwater fishing, where they fish, what they fish for, how successful they are, and what their major needs and desires are. We have initiated a program that will provide answers to many of these questions. I mentioned earlier that we have a marine recreational fisheries statistics program underway in the northeast section of the country. The purpose of this program is to provide answers to many of the questions that I just mentioned, as well as others. We plan to expand this program to include the southeast section of the country beginning in January. During calendar year 1976, assuming funding is available, we hope to conduct the same survey on the west coast. Thereafter, we hope to continue the program on each coast in alternative years. Assuming this program proceeds as we hope and is as successful as we expect, within a relatively short time the state and federal agencies involved in fisheries management, as well as organizations such as your own, will have available reasonably accurate basic statistics upon which to build future programs and make decisions. I won't attempt to describe the details of this program, but let me expand a little on a comment I made earlier about more than 20 million fishermen nationwide. The first results of our survey indicate that more than 10 million people participated at least once in marine fishing and shellfishing activities during the first six months of this year in the area from Virginia north to Maine. You may be wondering why the number is so much larger than the published results of the Hunting and Fishing Survey conducted as part of the 1970 census, which was 9.8 million people participating nationwide. The two surveys are not exactly comparable. For example, the Hunting and Fishing Survey did not include people involved in recreational shellfishing activities. Neither did it include persons below the age of 14 nor persons that participated less than three times a year or spent less than \$7.50 on this activity. Our survey has no such limitation. It includes both fin fish and shellfish activities and all participants regardless of age as well as those people that participated only one time. We are quite excited about the first results of this survey. We think the information will be quite an eye-opener for individuals that have indicated dubiousness about the importance of recreational fishing.

I mentioned the increased need for management of marine recreational fishing. Sound management is necessary to provide for optimum catch levels and to prevent the overharvest of stocks as well as to resolve or ameliorate conflicts between commercial and recreational harvests. Sound management requires detailed knowledge of the fish and fisheries. We now have about 15 research investigations underway aimed wholly or primarily at recreational fisheries or their target species. The newest of these is our investigation of Atlantic bluefin tuna. Other studies include our oceanic game fish study, a biostatistical study along the middle Atlantic, and they range from the preparation of the Angler's Guide for the Atlantic Coast to a comprehensive stock assessment study of 10 species important to recreational fishermen along the southwestern coast of the U.S. The total cost of these studies including the marine recreational statistics

program is approximately \$1,900,000 this year. I should mention that there was only one increase in the recreational fishing program this year, which was the Atlantic bluefin study. All of the other activities were either ongoing in previous years or a reorientation of a study that had previously been initiated or has been accomplished through reprogramming, which is moving funds already in our budget. We anticipate that new funds will be included in our budget for the next fiscal year for the initiation of additional new studies on recreational fisheries.

Another issue that needs attention is the need for a marine recreational fishing license. The National Marine Fisheries Service has no policy and has taken no position on this matter up to this time, but it is an issue that needs to be faced squarely, and soon. It seems to me there are a number of advantages for a marine recreational fisheries license. Such a license would provide an accurate registration of marine recreational fishermen—those that participate in this activity. If a registration of fishermen were available, the job of collecting the needed statistics that we have initiated in the northeast would be substantially easier and less costly. Simple registration of those that participate in this activity would be well worth the trouble and effort. Another important result of a marine recreational fisheries license would be that it would help to separate recreational fishermen from commercial fishermen. Regardless of your philosophy about fishermen who fish for pleasure and then sell their catch, in direct competition with those who make their livelihood fishing, most all will agree that separation of these two activities is absolutely essential. Proper management of a fishery harvest without a logical and accurate separation of these two functions is extremely difficult, if not impossible. Another obvious advantage would be the provision of funds to carry on needed programs of research, management, and for development of access for marine recreational fishing. This matter needs hard consideration by all of those interested in a sound marine recreational fisheries program including representatives of organizations such as these represented here today. While one can understand that commercial fishery interests might oppose creation of a marine recreational fishing license because it would call strong attention to the wide participation and growing importance of recreational fishing, it is difficult for me to understand the apathy on this matter prevalent throughout the recreational fishing fraternity when there is obviously so much to gain and so little to lose.

Another activity that the National Marine Fisheries Service needs to initiate is a close examination of recreational fishing to determine exactly where we should be putting our efforts and emphasis. For example, we need insight into the often asked question, "What constitutes good quality recreational fishing?" Is a good day's catch one big fish or ten small fish? Should we put more emphasis on fishing piers and fishing jetties? Is access the major problem? Supply of fish for the fisherman is always a problem, but what is the best way to grapple with this? Is the prospective development of exotic fisheries a matter that deserves high priority? At what level should forage fish be harvested for other uses? Certainly stocks of forage fish need to be maintained at a level that will provide adequate food for other predator species, but what is this level? I could go on and on asking such questions for which there are no answers or inadequate

answers. The point is there is much to be done. The cooperation and energetic efforts of all concerned—federal agencies, state agencies and organizations like yours—is badly needed to get some of these answers. The teamwork of all concerned is needed, particularly well-informed, interested recreational fishermen who have demonstrated their maturity and sense of responsibility to the resources they are concerned with in the manner that IGFA has in the Atlantic bluefin voluntary harvest reductions. The fishing public must practice constraint and conservation in its most basic sense. They need to become part of a team with energetic federal and state agencies, properly staffed and funded. If this teamwork can be developed, we just can't miss. It will take time. We won't accomplish everything in one day but such teamwork constitutes an irresistible force. For myself, I am pleased for the opportunity to be a part of it.