

NOAA Leadership Announces Major Reforms

State-Led Fisheries Management Advances; Review of Vessel Speed Rule Announced; Recreational Data Modernization Heralded

Miami Beach, Fla. – Tuesday, February 17, 2026 – National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Administrator Dr. Neil Jacobs announced a series of agency actions last week during the Discover Boating Miami International Boat Show:

- Advancing state-led fisheries management through Exempted Fishing Permits (EFPs);
- Revisiting long-standing regulatory policy on vessel speed, and
- Establishing a new pathway to modernize recreational fishing data.

NOAA announced that the South Atlantic states' EFPs have met agency requirements and been published in the Federal Register, opening a public comment period as part of the evaluation process. Publication represents an important next step toward final approval and reflects a growing reliance on state expertise, regional collaboration and data-driven management approaches.

The agency also announced it will reopen the vessel speed rule finalized in 2008 through an Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPRM). The deregulatory process will invite public comment on both the original rule and future direction and allow updated information and data, including private-sector technology solutions, to be placed on the record.

NOAA also outlined plans to establish a new on-ramp allowing willing states and regional commissions to contribute data and help design a modern replacement for the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). The effort, initially called the Recreational Angler Partnership Improvement Directive, or RAPID, is intended to improve data accuracy, transparency and confidence in recreational fisheries management by incorporating state expertise and regional collaboration.

“Administrator Jacobs deserves real credit for his leadership at NOAA,” said Jeff Angers, president of the Center for Sportfishing Policy. “Advancing state-led fisheries management and taking a hard look at a deeply flawed vessel speed rule reflects a thoughtful, practical approach to policy that has been missing for far too long. The states have asked for better data and a stronger role in management. Inviting collaborative federalism by opening the door for states and regional partners to help design the next generation of recreational data collection is a major step toward restoring confidence in fisheries management and getting better results on the water. We look forward to participating in the public process and supporting these smart solutions that strengthen conservation; improve confidence in fisheries data, and ensure practical management of America’s public waters.”

“Over the past week, we saw more advances in federal marine fisheries management than in the past several years combined,” said Mike Leonard, the American Sportfishing Association’s vice president of Government Affairs. “In total, these actions on South Atlantic red snapper, the vessel speed rule and recreational data collection prove NOAA leadership’s commitment to addressing longstanding problems that have limited recreational fishing access. The sportfishing industry is committed to working with NOAA to advance these and other priorities that will improve the nation’s \$78.4 billion saltwater recreational fishing economy.”

“The recreational fishing community has been asking for practical, science-based solutions to the enduring challenges we face, and we very much appreciate the leadership shown by NOAA in responding to those concerns,” said Chris Horton, Senior Director of Fisheries Policy for the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation. “Administrator Jacobs and his team at NOAA have demonstrated a clear commitment to working with states, anglers, and industry to improve confidence in fisheries management while ensuring conservation outcomes that are both effective and workable on the water.”

“We appreciate this new willingness – this new leadership – at NOAA to form more collaborative partnerships with stakeholders,” said Ted Venker, conservation director for Coastal Conservation Association. “An open, transparent process is the only way to arrive at solutions that work for everyone and all of these announcements outline better pathways to address long-standing, unnecessarily contentious issues. We are hopeful this signals a new era in fisheries management and look forward to supporting these and other initiatives.”