Response to Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries Oversight Hearing
1324 Longworth House Office Building
June 4, 2025
10:15AM

"Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness."

Questions from Chairman Bruce Westerman for Ms. Martha Guyas, Southeast Fisheries Policy Director at American Sportfishing Association

1. Ms. Guyas, the President's Executive Order, "Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness," talks about the use of new technologies and modernizing data collection efforts. How could implementing those provisions improve recreational fisheries management?

   Response: Too often, especially in the southeastern U.S. where I live, fisheries stock assessments have high levels of uncertainty (if assessments are even available) due to unreliable or sparse fishery data. The uncertainty caused by use of questionable fishery data to inform the status of fisheries and make management decisions can have severe implications for fish stocks, anglers, businesses, communities and the economy. New technologies and modernized data collection would benefit recreational fisheries management by providing more accurate information to inform stock assessments and management decisions.

   Several efforts led by states in my region are underway to modernize recreational data collection and determine how new technologies can help improve data that feeds into fisheries stock assessments and management. The Gulf states created their own programs to improve recreational catch and effort estimates and address Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) shortcomings nearly a decade ago. These programs allowed for the Gulf states to be delegated authority to manage private angler harvest of Gulf red snapper in federal waters. With the Gulf states in charge of data collection and management of this fishery, recreational harvest access has drastically improved and management is tailored to local needs and trusted by anglers.

   In the South Atlantic, the State of Florida is currently using innovative technologies like cell phone apps as part of exempted fishing permit (EFP) research programs to collect much needed data from offshore recreational anglers, such as information on discards (fish that are caught and released rather than harvested). This information is critical because MRIP estimates of recreational discards are highly unreliable but have been cited by NOAA Fisheries as a major source of fishery mortality in fisheries such as Atlantic red snapper and black sea bass, and even used by NOAA Fisheries to justify a draconian proposal to close fishing for 55 species in a large area off east Florida to prevent anglers from catching and releasing red snapper. Better data to characterize recreational fisheries are critical to ensuring management actions are reasonable and appropriate to balance conservation and access.