CHAPTER VII

MARINE SPORT FISHERIES

There is really no need to point out the importance of saltwater sport fishing. In summer almost every pier, bridge, beach, and jetty have their complement of recreational fishermen. Marinas owe much of their growth to the increasing popularity of sport fishing, and party boats and charter boats can be seen at many. Fishing derbies have become popular, for example, the Virginia Sport Fishing Tournament, which is sponsored by the State. There is no doubt that saltwater sport catches have been increasing since at least 1945, with increasing affluence and leisure time, and the numbers of saltwater sport fishermen have been increasing, also.

Getting information on this fishery has been difficult. Some states issue licenses but many do not. There are no central landing points and very little regulation, and no routine annual statistics for the country as a whole. California has collected some statistics for a fairly long time, and there have been some local surveys by states or smaller areas. But these are usually incomplete and spasmodic. Methods used have included creel census, either on the water or from shore, post cards with certain questions about species, amounts, and so on, or interviews of participants. Each has its limitations. There are exaggerations in numbers and weights, uncertainty as to kinds of fish caught, memory lapses as to actual numbers, which show up as unusually high estimates of fives and tens, and a reluctance to admit that none at all was taken.

The first national survey was in 1960 in connection with the national census (Clark 1962). It had many recognized deficiencies, including those mentioned above. A comparison of the California survey with the 1965 angling survey (Deuel and Clark 1968) for the same area showed that the federal survey overestimated the catch from 3.1 times to 25.9 times depending on the kind of fishing surveyed. The overall federal estimate was about 48,500,000 fishes caught, whereas the California Department of Fish and Game had an estimate for the same area and the same kinds of fishing of about 7,100,000 fishes. The federal estimate was about 6.8 times the state estimate. It was pointed out that the estimated figures for party boats, the category for which the Department of Fish and Game had the greatest experience, and therefore on which the greatest reliance could be placed, showed the least difference, namely 3.1 times. It was concluded that this difference could have been caused by overestimation by the U.S. Bureau of Census and underestimation by the California Department of Fish and Game, and that a factor of 3.1 might be near the minimum to be expected for any comparison of direct collection and recall methods of estimating catches.

A subsequent survey, using essentially the same methods, was done in 1970 (Deuel 1973). These three surveys gave the following estimated weights of finfishes caught by recreational anglers around the United States: 1960 - 1,380,301,000 pounds; 1965 - 1,474,353,000 pounds; 1970 - 1,576,823,000 pounds. The numbers of fishermen that made these catches also rose, from 4,557,000 in 1955; to 6,292,000 in 1960; to 8,305,000 in 1965; and to 9,460,000 in 1970. In 1974 and 1975 regional surveys were made in the northeastern United States (Maine through Virginia) and the southeastern United States (North Carolina through Texas) respectively. These were still not entirely satisfactory. Consequently a methodology study began in 1976 under contract with a private firm, and was completed in 1977. This led to new surveys, using this new methodology, which will be done annually for the next several years.

The 1979 recreational fishing survey covered the coast from Maine to Texas, but not the west coast (Table 3). The total catch of fishes brought ashore in whole form, and thus available for identification, enumeration, weighing, and measuring by interviewers was 190,371,000 pounds (Type A). The total catch used for bait, discarded dead, given away, or brought ashore filleted or otherwise dressed was counted only. The weights of these fish were estimated to be the same as Type A, and totalled about 173,629,000 pounds (Type B1). Thus, the total pounds of fishes killed by sport fishermen were estimated at 364,000,000, which was between one-third and one-quarter of the fishes taken by commercial fishermen in the same area, omitting the industrial species. It will be noted in Table 3 that several species were taken in greater weight by recreational fishermen than by commercial fishermen, notably sharks (about 10 times as many), bluefish (about seven times as many), spotted sea trout and sand sea trout (about three times as many), groupers, other snappers, and Atlantic mackerel (about twice as many), and winter flounder, red snapper, striped bass, and summer flounder (about as many as commercial fishermen). Note also that these new estimates of recreational catch are more conservative than previous estimates, but still substantial. Clearly, recreational catches are important, and must be taken into consideration if the resources are to be managed.

Many problems are raised by the saltwater sport fisheries. There is virtually no supervision, and large numbers of small fishes are probably taken. Large numbers of large fishes are also taken, and much of this is wasted, so that sport fishing is a wasteful process in many cases. Many sport fishermen also sell many of their fishes, and then the question arises, are they sport or commercial fishermen? Sport fishermen have strong feelings about their sport, and many believe that commercial fishing should be strictly regulated, especially for some species like bluefish, certain flounders, and striped bass. For bluefish, for example, most recreational fishermen believe that certain commercial gears should be prohibited and that the commercial catch should not exceed certain limits. Yet many of these same fishermen

Table 3. - Estimated catches by recreational fishermen and by commercial fishermen from Maine to Texas in 1979. Weights in thousands of pounds.

Species	Recreational Fishery			Commercial Fishery
	Type A	Type B (estim)	Totals	
Bluefish	48,027	40,296	88,323	13,207
Sharks	8,708	26,511	35,219	3,325
Other marine finfishes	7,424	16,610	24,034	12,234
Summer flounder	14,427	7,638	22,065	30,721
Winter flounder	8,399	9,484	17,883	24,810
Dolphins	5,065	9,711	14,776	*
Spotted sea trout	8,842	3,876	12,718	4,455
Weakfish	7,881	2,622	10,503	30,579
King mackerel	5,901	4,053	9,954	4,859
Groupers	5,358	3,455	8,813	8,156
Mullet	3,506	4,926	8,432	25,886
Mackerels and tunas	4,686	3,301	7,987	*
Atlantic cod	1,605	5,640	7,245	99,352
Atlantic mackerel	3,773	2,975	6,748	4,463
Atlantic croaker	3,715	2,741	6,456	28,040
Scup	3,797	1,652	5,449	20,472
Red snapper	3,003	2,425	5,428	4,941
Red drum	3,943	1,109	5,052	*
Tautog	3,385	1,645	5,030	*
Spanish mackerel	3,118	1,466	4,584	6,450
Other snappers	1,956	2,589	4,545	2,854
Spot	2,134	1,967	4,101	*
Sheepshead	3,367	686	4,053	*
Crevalle jack	2,218	1,671	3,889	*
Sand sea trout	2,939	750	3,689	1,322
Atlantic pollock	547	3,054	3,601	35,546
Black drum	3,369	181	3,550	*
Striped bass	2,523	761	3,284	3,492
Jacks	1,691	1,391	3,082	*
Atlantic bonito	858	1,760	2,618	5,422
Black sea bass	1,208	1,380	2,588	4,531
Atlantic herring	31	2,362	2,393	143,372
Little tuna	1,484	710	2,194	126
Kingfishes	1,005	353	1,358	*
White perch	1,043	280	1,323	*
Dogfish sharks	223	404	627	19,319
Hakes	284	150	434	15,921
Subtotals	181,443	172,685	354,128	553,855
Grand totals	190,371	173,629	364,000	1,332,094

*No comparable category.

believe that sport fishing should not be regulated at all, and that they should be allowed to sell their excess catches. For striped bass, most recreational fishermen believe that commercial fishing should be stopped altogether, and that striped bass should be made a game fish. In fact, in some states this has already been done. There are also moves to prevent importation of striped bass from states without such laws. This would have effects on the consumer, who, unless he wants to go striped bass fishing himself, or has a friend who is a striped bass fisherman and will give him a striped bass once in a while, must rely on sport fishermen who sell their catch to a dealer. There is a real question then as to equity and fairness. The arguments are often bitter, with little regard for the facts, and can only be solved by political means, which are often unfair. The facts are usually incomplete, and the winners are often those who can speak the loudest. Conservation, which is the principal objective of all fishery management, or should be, is often ignored.

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