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EDITORIAL

## A Fishermen's Phone Book

Your mother was wrong: There are not, as far as we can tell, plenty of fish in the sea. At least not at the levels needed to sustain commercial and recreational fisheries of certain species. But how many fish are there, anyway? And how is fishing affecting their numbers? A new National Saltwater Angler Registry aims to help answer those questions.

Come January, saltwater sport fishermen will be required to give the National Marine Fisheries Service their name, address and phone number so they can be interviewed. The registry will replace a creaky system that relies on, among other things, random-digit phone surveys, with researchers asking whoever answers whether anyone there fished and what was caught.

Signing up is mandatory and free until 2011, and \$15 to \$25 after that. You're exempt if your state already has a saltwater fishing license program that collects the pertinent data. In New York, a new license becomes mandatory in October. New Jersey, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Hampshire and Maine have not yet gotten with the program.

Saltwater licenses are old hat on the West Coast and in the gulf states. Although most fishermen here in the Northeast recognize the need for rules and responsible behavior to protect a threatened resource, many are also reluctant to start paying for something that's been free forever. And there are, of course, those who defend as God-given their right to "harvest" a crop they did nothing to sow. New York's license and fees (\$10 a year for residents; \$150 for a lifetime) will take some getting used to, but they are reasonable and necessary.

We're siding with this guy, who recently posted on a popular Internet fishing discussion group: "I think making people pay for a license invests them in the process, and perhaps will make folks begin to think before deciding to fill up a bucket with schoolie stripers" — that is, undersized, illegal striped bass — "or short fluke because 'I only fish once or twice a year.'"

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