



Committee Report . . .



Menhaden Committee



Ed Cook, Chairman

2008 RESTRICTIONS ON MENHADEN BOATS CONSIDERED

On January 23, I attended the meeting of the RIMFC Menhaden Advisory Panel in Wakefield, RI.

The Advisory Panels (AP) are made up of representatives from various commercial groups, recreational representatives, a biologist and a DEM representative. They meet to solve problems and make recommendations to the R.I. Marine Fisheries Council. The AP's are chaired by a member of the Fisheries Council, and the Menhaden AP is chaired by Steve Medeiros (RISAA's president).

The purpose of this meeting was to consider making permanent changes regulations for the control of the menhaden fishery in Rhode Island.

Two representatives of the Ark Bait Company were present.

The meeting began with a review of the 2007 menhaden fishery by Jason McNamee, a DEM biologist. For the first time, DEM had a pretty good handle on the number of menhaden that come into Narragansett Bay during 2007. Using various trawl surveys (DEM, URI, etc) and data from observers on the actual purse seine boat and in their spotter plane, then feeding all of this information into computer models, they could accurately count the total stock on a daily basis and at the same time, record the quantity of fish removed.

An explanation of the computer program was given to panel members. The data fed in included depletion (fish eaten by stripers, etc.), abundance (number of fish in the bay), purse seine removals, ingress and egress (schools that swim on their own in and out of the bay), and other factors such as natural mortality and growth.

The menhaden legislation introduced in 2007 brought all of this to the forefront. While fierce battles of words raged between recreational fishermen, environmentalists, lobstermen and others, the outcome was that everyone in Rhode Island realized the importance of this fish. RIDEM moved menhaden to the top of their efforts list (thanks!), and began research that pleased everyone involved.

As a result, all was well with menhaden in Narragansett Bay last spring, and DEM was watching the situation carefully - and everyone was watching DEM carefully to see that they did as promised. They did.

Then a second menhaden boat appeared in Narragansett Bay. This was a very large boat, from Maine, and suddenly the control of menhaden was in danger.

DEM Director Michael Sullivan instituted emergency regulations to give DEM control of the situation. (to page 52)

Fisheries Report . . .

Rhode Island Marine Fisheries Council's Striped Bass Advisory Panel Meeting



Report by John Stavarakas

The RIMFC's Striped Bass Advisory Panel (AP) met on January 10, 2008 discussing both commercial and recreational regulations for 2008.

The panel recommended accepting the following:

- Rhode Island's fish trap owners proposed returning to a November 1st rollover date.

The fish traps sector in Rhode Island actually get their own share of the state's commercial quota. At the end of the season, if they haven't caught their whole allotment, the remaining quota is transferred to the general commercial category.

- Rhode Island Commercial Rod & Reel Angler's Association proposed to keep status quo for 2008, following the same regulations as in 2007.

- For the recreational fishery, there will be no change in 2008: a 28 inch minimum size and anglers can keep two fish per day.

BYCATCH MONITORING

There was also some discussion regarding the findings in Addendum I to Amendment 6 of the Atlantic Striped Bass Fishery Management Plan by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC).



Addendum I establishes a bycatch monitoring and research program to increase the accuracy of data on striped bass discards, as required by Amendment 6. It includes a report on existing data some of which I've listed below:

TOTAL REMOVALS OF FISH:

- COMMERCIAL HARVEST: 17%
- COMMERCIAL DEAD DISCARD: 10%
- RECREATIONAL HARVEST: 47%
- RECREATIONAL DEAD DISCARD: 26%

It is important to note the second largest impact on the fishery is the recreational dead discard. Of the 25.9 million fish landed and released in 2006, it is estimated that 2.1 million released fish died from hooking mortality.

An improvement in data quality and accuracy as well as education in the recreational angler community on how to handle and release fish seems to be the current focus for managing this fishery.

A link to Addendum I is included below.

<http://www.asmf.org/speciesDocuments/stripedBass/fmps/sBAddendumIBoardApprovedFINAL.pdf>