

WITEK: BLUEFISH (from page 9)

Anglers have come to realize that fishing is more enjoyable when fish were abundant, and that they can help to assure such abundance by releasing unwanted bluefish, instead of using them for crab bait. Unfortunately, it seems that the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Mid-Atlantic Council) and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) now want to penalize bluefish anglers for adopting that conservation ethic.

On April 30, in a joint meeting, the Mid-Atlantic Council and ASMFC's Bluefish Management Board (Management Board) approved a Draft Scoping and Public Information Document for a proposed Bluefish Allocation Amendment to the Bluefish Management Plan (Scoping Document). One of the primary issues to be addressed in the Scoping Document is whether the current recreational/commercial allocation should be changed.

As the Scoping Document notes, "These allocations were developed using catch data from 1981-1989 (the years prior to regulations that may have affected both recreational and commercial landings) and are still the basis for current bluefish allocations. Stakeholders would like to see allocations reviewed using more recent catch histories."

While that statement may be true, there are problems with its underlying premise.

Although the terms "catch data" and "catch histories" are widely used in fishery management, it would be far more accurate to say that the allocation and **any reallocation of bluefish that might occur are based on "kill" data and "kill" histories**, because fish that anglers return to the waters alive were never a part of the calculation.

That skews the allocation discussion, for in catch-and-release fisheries, the most important consideration isn't sustainable yield, or the number of fish that can safely be removed from the water, but instead sustainable abundance, the number of fish available for anglers to catch, release, then hopefully catch again.

Fish can be, and are, utilized, even if they are not killed.

That's acknowledged in the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens),

which defines "optimum" yield as "the amount of fish which will provide the greatest overall benefit to the Nation, particularly with respect to food production *and recreational opportunities*... [emphasis added]"

Yet, despite the fact that such language clearly values recreational opportunity as much as it does food production, fishery managers still give purely recreational considerations little weight in their decisions, and instead practice what might be termed "**dead fish management**," placing all of the emphasis on harvest.

The Mid-Atlantic Council has never acknowledged that recreational fishermen are fully utilizing their bluefish allocation when they maximize recreational opportunities through catch and release.

Capt. John McMurray, an ASMFC commissioner from New York, raised that point at the joint meeting, pointing out that the Scoping Document failed to address "the value of keeping fish in the water." ASMFC staff agreed to add such language before the document was released to the public.

Capt. Tony DiLernia, who represents New York on the Mid-Atlantic Council, raised another important issue. He pointed out that the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP), which estimates recreational catch and recreational harvest, is revising its figures for angling effort. And, as noted in the Scoping Document, "Preliminary MRIP calibration work suggests all effort estimations will increase ~3-5 times.

This increase has the potential to drastically alter bluefish catch/landings/effort data for the shore and private angler modes."

Thus, there is a very good chance that recreational bluefish landings will turn out to be much higher than previously believed, probably high enough that no reallocation of recreational quota to the commercial sector could be justified. Because of that, Capt. DiLernia suggested that the Scoping Document not be released until the revised MRIP data becomes public.

Until then, no one will know how many bluefish anglers truly catch, or kill. (to page 33)



Guided Fishing Trips
in the waters off Newport and Southern New England
Captain Eric Thomas
Fully licensed and insured with 30 years experience

Find Teezer77
on the web



401.524.7239 :tel • www.Teezer77.com

Facebook, YouTube, Twitter icons



REQUIRED READING
If you fish anywhere, anyhow or
anytime... you **MUST** have this catalog!
Call or write for your **FREE COPY** now!

hooks@terminaltackleco.com
www.terminaltackleco.com

TERMINAL TACKLE CO.
120 Main Street, Kings Park, NY 11754
631-269-6005

TACKLE SUPPLIERS TO THE WORLD

