

ecoRI: Blasting In Bay (from page 20)

Hamilton, Jarbeau, and Barrington resident Susannah Holloway argued that QDC should be required to apply for a marine mammal take authorization from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, as was required for construction of the Block Island Wind Farm.

Holloway called for a larger safety area for protecting sea life and urged that the blasting occur in summer, when flounder would likely be the only threatened species.

“This sound [from blasting] is much louder and a lot more damaging,” she said.

Edward Spinard Jr., development services director for QDC, defended not having the federal take authorization, saying that blasting will be done much less frequently than the continual pile driving required to build the nation’s first offshore wind facility.

Spinard and CRMC noted that the authorization for taking wasn’t required because QDC wrote a thorough and detailed blasting plan that is designed to avoid killing marine mammals.

“A take authorization is a license to kill,” Spinard said. “We don’t want any takes.”

David Reis, of CRMC’s permitting staff, said the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management and the Army Corps of Engineers have already vetted the blasting plan.

“It’s beyond our expertise, but it’s also beyond our jurisdiction,” he said.

Gomez was pleased that delayed pulse charges will be used to demolish the rock, so that marine life isn’t exposed to the full blast at all once.

Spinard said the rocky outcrop was missed during the



Dredging is already underway for the West Quonset Channel

original dredging survey, conducted by a previous dredging company. The new dredging contractor, Cashman Dredging, recently completed a year of blasting New Bedford Harbor, Spinard noted. That project was more than 10 times the size of the QDC project and required multiple blasts per day.

“They ended up with zero takes,” Spinard said.

Cashman Dredging has already removed much of the rock from the new West Quonset Channel, reducing the blast area from

130,000 square feet to 30,000 square feet. The volume of rock to blast has been reduced from 9,000 cubic yards to 1,000 cubic yards.

To avoid harm to sea life, QDC’s plan includes a 1,500-foot exclusionary zone around the blast site. Eight biologists will watch for marine mammals from three boats before and after blasting. The blasting will occur once a day for 15 days. Underwater microphones and side sonar will be used to search for schools of fish and marine mammals. A fish-startle system will be deployed to scare schools of fish and their mammal predators out of the blasting zone. Each blast will be measured to be sure desired sound levels are met, according to the QDC plan.

“We are using every known monitoring technique to get zero takes,” Spinard said.

QDC can begin blasting as soon as it receives written approval from CRMC, which typically takes a few days after a vote is taken. Blasting must end by Jan. 31 to protect fisheries, in particular winter flounder spawning season.

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WITEK: FORGOTTEN TOOL (from page 9)

Yet, despite that advice, the Council and [the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission’s Bluefish Management] Board did not carry out any discussion or review of potential 2021 landings projections at all. Instead, both management bodies blithely ignored the uncertainty surrounding the 2021 recreational harvest limit and approved status quo rules, despite the extremely high level of management uncertainty and the substantial likelihood that overfishing will, in fact, occur.

Even in normal years, when there is no COVID-19 pandemic to add to fisheries managers’ woes, management uncertainty is present, to a greater or lesser degree, in every recreational fishery. Yet even a cursory look at the rulemaking process will reveal that regional fishery management councils are very reluctant to acknowledge such uncertainty by adopting annual catch targets or, in the absence of such targets, explicitly accounting for management uncertainty when they set ACLs, despite the published Guidelines.

The reason for that is clear.

By establishing annual catch targets, the regional fishery management councils would be reducing the amount of fish

available to anglers. And in a management system that, largely due to constant pressure exerted by the recreational fishing industry, places undue emphasis on maximizing the amount of fish available for harvest, rather than reducing landings in order to create a buffer against the unknown, lowering harvest limits when not legally required to do so can be viewed as anathema.

That’s particularly true when the majority of the council members are members of the recreational and commercial fishing industries, and would be personally impacted by harvest reductions.

But management uncertainty is real. It is something that fisheries managers ignore at their peril.

And at our fisheries’ peril as well.

Charles Witek, from Greenwich CT, has spent over 50 years on the water, and is a well-known author and blogger. Witek said, “I have realized that without strong fisheries laws and effective conservation measures, the future of salt water fishing, and America’s living marine resources, is dim.”