

JCAA NEWSPAPER APRIL 2012

Official Newspaper of the *JERSEY COAST ANGLERS ASSOCIATION*
(Published on March 20th, 2012)

Monthly Meeting Room Brick Plaza at 270 Chambers Bridge Rd
"WORKING FOR MARINE RECREATIONAL ANGLERS"

JCAA REGULAR MEETING:

Tuesday, March 27th, 2012

Starting at 7:30 PM

At Brick Plaza at 270 Chambers Bridge Rd

NEXT JCAA BOARD MEETING

Thursday, April 12th, 2012

Starting at 7:30 PM at JCAA Office

OFFICIAL NEWSPAPER OF THE JERSEY COAST ANGLERS ASSOC.

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JCAA Newspaper Publisher Tom Fote

JCAA Newspaper Editor Paul Turi

This publication is printed and mailed one week prior to each regular monthly meeting of the Jersey Coast Anglers Association. One of the prime goals of JCAA is to get accurate information into public hands as soon as possible.

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**JCAA General Membership Meetings are for club representatives and invited guests only. These meetings are not open to the general public. If you would like to attend as a guest, call the President at 908-913-0551 or Tom Fote at (732) 270-9102 before the meeting date to ask permission.**  
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2012 OFFICERS

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Mem. Sec.	John Toth	732-695-3431

Tournament Dir.

Committee & Chairpersons listed on last page

IMPORTANT DATES

- March 27th** JCAA General Meeting
- April 5th** Menhaden Hearing
- April 12th** JCAA Board Meeting
- April 24th** JCAA General Meeting
- April 26th** Barnegat Bay Partnership Meeting
- April 30th-May 3rd** ASMFC Meeting

2012 High Rollers Raffle

It is now time for the JCAA High Rollers 2012 Raffle. We have put together a terrific selection of rods and reels and other prizes for a raffle that will be drawn on April 24, 2012. This is a major fundraiser for the JCAA. The 8 prizes are listed below with a value of over \$3,832. Tickets will be two dollars each and Club Representatives can get books of tickets to sell by attending a JCAA meeting. If you would like to buy raffle tickets call the JCAA office. JCAA will have a booth at the Saltwater Fishing Show Mar. 16th - 18th. Stop by and say hello where the raffle tickets will be available for sale and the prizes will be on display. Raffle ticket books will also be mailed along with entries for the 18th Annual JCAA Fluke Tournament. If you would like to buy raffle tickets call the JCAA office. When your club representative brings them to your club, please help with your purchase. Without your continued support we cannot function as an organization in protecting the marine resource and angler's rights.

1. Penn 30VSX International Reel with Penn VS3080TS60 6' Rod Value \$709 *Donated by JCAA*
2. Tony Maja Products Bunker Spoon Rod, Reel, Metered Braided Line and Bunker Spoon Value \$623 *Donated by BarnegatFishinHole.com*
3. Minn Kota Riptide Trolling Motor model RT 55/SE/L&D Value \$550 *Donated by Johnson Outdoors Inc*

4. \$500 Gift Certificate to Fishermen Headquarters
Value \$500 *Donated by Fishermen Headquarters*
5. Canyon Reels HS-15 Reel with G Loomis SWR84-40C 7'
Value \$477 *Donated by Canyon Reels and JCAA*
6. Penn 965 Reel with Penn Torque TG1220C66 6' 6" Rod
Value \$413 *Donated by Penn*
7. Two Gallons of Interlux Micron CSC Antifouling Paint
Value \$400 *Donated by InterLux*
8. Shakespeare Ugly Stik SP1166 1MH 6' 6" Rod with Penn
Battle BTL 4000 Reel Value \$160 *Donated by Penn*

President's Report

By Joseph Puntasecca

On Thursday, March 15th I attended the NJ Sportsmen's Legislative Caucus in Trenton. I was happy to see a great turn out by the public and stakeholders as well as our legislators. Senate President Steve Sweeney made the opening remarks. The guest speaker was Stanton Hales, Jr. Ph.D. from the Barnegat Bay Partnership. Dr. Hales gave a presentation on the status of Barnegat Bay, what is currently being done to protect this tremendous resource, what direction the Barnegat Bay Partnership believes should be taken to prevent further damage to it and restore it to its once vibrant, glorious and balanced eco system it once was.

Also on Thursday, March 15, 2012 the State Senate passed Bill S1177, "Prohibits the use of certain fishing gear at artificial reef sites." The bill passed 34 in favor, 3 opposed and 2 no votes. This is the bill Jersey Coast Anglers Association supports and that JCAA requested the bill to be heard by the full Senate. JCAA thanks Senate President Sweeney for allowing the bill to be heard by the full Senate and all the Senators for their support for the bill. We look forward to seeing a companion bill to bill S1177 posted and passed by the full Assembly.

Shore Aquatic Club

The Shore Aquatic Club, (SAC), based in Manasquan, NJ is dive club which has applied for membership with the JCAA. Shore Aquatic is a member of the NJ Council of Diving Clubs which is a current member of JCAA. Many of you know Frank Macalik who attends the general meetings for NJCDC and also volunteers at some of the shows we exhibit in. At the next general meeting JCAA will have a vote on Shore Aquatic's membership in the JCAA.

Recreational Regulation Hijacked by Commercial Fisherman?

Good News for recreational anglers. Maybe, just maybe, the recreational anglers of New Jersey are finally being rewarded for their many years of sacrifice. We have seen the size limits go up and up since 1993 to the point where we are only catching what we would have considered a trophy fish years ago. At 18" nearly 100% of the fish are female so we have been taking the most productive fish out of the ecosystem. The New Jersey Marine Fisheries Council has set the Summer Flounder season at May 5 – Sept 28 with a 17 ½" minimum size limit and 5 fish bag limit.

There were almost 100 people at the NJ Marine Fisheries Council meeting in Toms River on Thursday March 1st and they witnessed a very interesting meeting. The meeting on the summer flounder regulations has been moved from Galloway to Toms River in an effort to encourage anglers from North Jersey to attend and let their voices be heard. Yet most of those in attendance were from the South. The testimony was about evenly split between the 18", 8 fish bag limit and a longer season and the 17 ½" fish which was approved. Those from the South leaned toward the 17 ½" fish and most of those from the North favored the 18" fish. If more anglers from the North had shown up and testified I'm sure the vote would have gone the other way since the edge was slightly in favor of the smaller fish.

The interesting thing about the meeting was the dynamics of the vote. The summer flounder committee and advisors had met the week before and listened to the same pros and cons that were put forth at this meeting. That summer flounder committee is made up of recreational anglers on the council and recreational advisors. The recommendation which came from these recreational anglers of the state was for the 18" size and longer season and that was the motion in front of the council.

A commercial fisherman then made a substitute motion for the 17 ½" fish. The vote: You guessed it the four commercial seats on the council voted for the 17 ½" fish and the three recreational seats voted for the committee recommendation of the 18" fish. So what happened?

Regardless of whether you personally favor 17 ½" or 18" is not the point. The commercial fishermen of the state set the recreational summer flounder regulation for 2012. Does that seem right to you?

Thank you to everyone who came out to the Saltwater Expo, signed the Reef Rescue petition and purchased raffle tickets to help support Jersey Coast Anglers Association. Also thank you to all the volunteers who helped to staff our booth at the Expo.

Report on NJ Assembly Meeting on Pots off the Reef Bill

By John Toth

Background

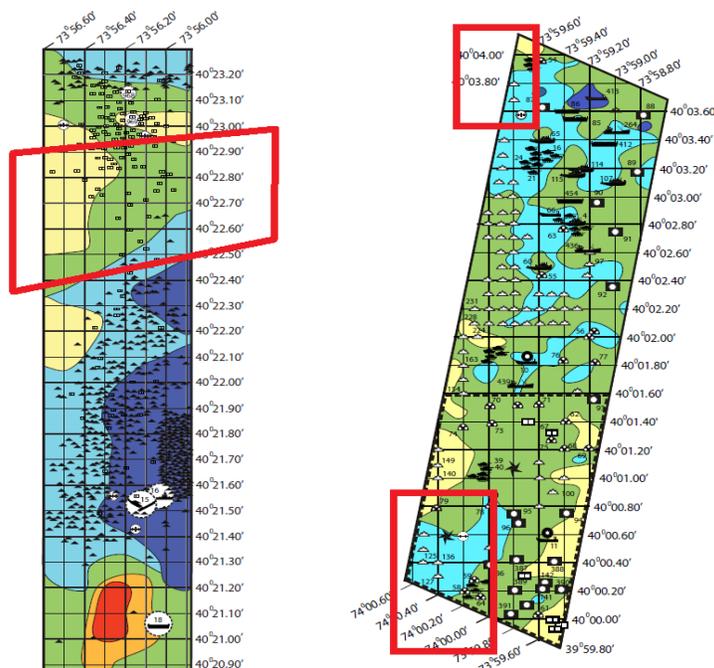
Members of the Assembly Agricultural and Natural Resources Committee, chaired by Assembly Committee Chairman Nelson T. Albano, held a hearing on Bill A-2645 (Pots Off the Reef) on March 8th at the State House Annex in Trenton to determine if this bill should be approved by this committee and be moved to NJ's Assembly for approval. The Pots off the Reef Bill has been the focus of recreational anglers for approximately eight (8) years in our efforts to remove commercial gear from the two reefs in NJ's waters (Sandy Hook and Axel Carlson). Although we have been able to get bills we supported approved several times by NJ's Senate members, it has been blocked from a hearing by past Assembly Speaker Roberts, and the current Chairman of the Agriculture and Natural Resource Committee, Nelson Albano. If the bill does not get posted for a vote on the Assembly docket, it does not pass. In 2011, even though the Pots Off the Reef Bill had over 50 sponsors in the Assembly last year, Chairman Nelson Albano did not move it forward to a vote in the Agriculture and Natural Resource Committee.

What is different this time is that this new Assembly bill reflects a **compromise solution** in that sections of the two reefs would permit commercial anglers to deploy their gear and be restricted to these specific zones. Essentially, Committee Chairman Albano said that this Pot Bill has been a source of contention for a number of years between the commercial and recreational anglers and that he wanted to propose a compromise solution to bring this issue to closure.

Problems with Bill A-2645

There are a number of problems that surfaced in testimony with this bill that need resolution and they are:

- The coordinates showing the sections that the commercial anglers could deploy their gear as presented were incredibly all wrong. They need to be corrected so that it can be determined what percentages of the reefs that the commercials are actually getting. They can be as high as 23% on Sandy Hook and 12% on Axel Carlson.
- The issue of future Federal funding for the reefs may continue to be jeopardized since Federal law requires that the usage of the reefs must be accessible to everybody, just like a public park. Restricting sections of the reefs appears to violate this regulation. There has been no input from the Federal authorities on this issue before the bill was released. Assemblyman Albano indicated that he has had difficulties in contacting the Federal authorities to get a ruling on this bill.
- Who will enforce this bill? Divers would have to go the reefs on a periodic basis to determine if the commercial gear has been confined to their allocated positions and not moved to recreational sections of the reefs. The Division of Fish & Wildlife is under severe monetary constraints and does not have the money and employees to enforce this bill.
- How will this bill affect the thirteen reefs in Federal waters? Will these reefs need to have sections set aside for commercial gear like the two reefs in our waters?



Sandy Hook Reef

Axel Carlson Reef

Testimony on this Bill

The Garden State Seafood representative, Scott Mackey, testified **in favor** of this bill claiming that the commercials had “Historic Rights” to have gear on the reefs. Adam Nowalsky from the Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA) also spoke **in favor** of this bill.

Voting **against** this bill was John Toth representing the JCAA, along with Marvin Aleski from the Hudson River Fisherman’s Association, Don Marantz (Newark Bait & Fly Casting Club, JCAA), Noel Angelucci from Fortescue Anglers and Ron Nachmann from South Jersey Saltwater Anglers. Their testimony mirrored the issues in the above bullets. Pete Grimбилas from The New Jersey Outdoor Alliance and Reef Rescue wanted the bill delayed since the coordinates were wrong and the Federal approval for this bill was not confirmed. Paul Haertel from the Berkeley Striper Club opposed the bill but testified that his club might reconsider provided a number of changes were made. The NJ Council of Dive Clubs abstained since they did not have a chance to contact their membership on this bill because of the short time it came to committee. Bill Figley read to Committee members the Federal regulations that stipulate that the reefs are for usage by everybody, not a select few. He further stated that they were specifically created for use by recreational fishermen and divers. The Fish Hawks provided a written statement to the committee opposing this bill. Ron Nachmann also made the point that if you have dog with a five-foot leash, he will walk at the end of the five-foot leash. If you extend this leash further, he will walk to the longest point of the leash. If there is money involved, the commercial gear will keep on extending on the reefs from their restricted zone to eventually cover the reefs.

Committee Voting Record

The bill moved out of committee since it was only approved by the **Democrats** on this committee including: Assembly members Wilson, Caride, and Albano. **Republican** members Dancer and Clifton abstained.

JCAA President Joseph Puntasecca could not testify on behalf of the JCAA because of a medical issue. I read a prepared testimony to the committee that the JCAA does **NOT SUPPORT this bill** and that the Senate version of it should be

passed that **moves the commercial gear off the reefs!**

The testimony I gave on behalf of the JCAA follows:

Assembly Testimony on A-2645

We would like to thank the committee for holding this hearing on an issue that is very important to the recreational fishing community. JCAA has had no time to review the bill that you are discussing today since it was released yesterday. However, it does not appear that this bill will address our major concerns about the artificial reefs.

While this may not be the intention of the sponsor, we believe this bill is simply a delaying tactic. It does not solve the problem or address the issues from the perspective of the recreational fishing community. It also does not address the ruling of the Fish and Wildlife Service that denies the use of their Sport Fish Restoration Program by the Division of Fish and Wildlife on New Jersey’s artificial reef program.

The reason JCAA feels this bill is only a delaying tactic is that this bill does not in law regulate the gear restrictions on the artificial reef. It redirects this effort back to the New Jersey Marine Fisheries Council. In 10 years the NJ Marine Fisheries Council has been unable to address this problem and it is unlikely they will be able to do so now. There is a basic flaw in the NJ Marine Fisheries Council since the recreational community has four (4) votes and the commercial community has 5 votes. When problems with the artificial reef were first brought to the Council before, there were never enough votes for passage. Recent history confirms this inequity. Last Thursday, the recreational members of the NJ Marine Fisheries Council introduced a proposal on the recreational regulations for 2012. The commercial community, even though this had no impact on them, made a motion and voted for a measure that was not supported by many of the recreational members. Because of this inequity, we never accomplish anything for recreational anglers. This is like one part rule with never an election to change the balance. We need the Legislature to step up and solve this problem with appropriate legislation.

**JCAA's 18th Annual Fluke
Tournament, June 9, 2012
With New Striped Bass Category!**
By Paul Haertel

The NJ Senate passed a bill three times by an overwhelming vote. This is the bill that the JCAA supports. Last session, 43 Assemblymen and women, including members of this committee, supported the Senate bill. When the Assembly version on the Senate bill was introduced in the Assembly in January, it had 44 sponsors. That is a bipartisan majority of the members of the Assembly.

This is the bill that should be posted for a vote in this committee. This is the bill that has the overwhelming support of the 800,000 recreational anglers in New Jersey. This is the bill that would solve the problem, not just delay the solution for another five (5) years.

If the commercial community wants artificial reefs, they should fund them and build them the same way the recreational community has. According to studies, 40% of the fish caught by recreational anglers to take home and eat come from the artificial reefs.

What this discussion frequently ignores is the job loss in New Jersey's recreational community. By moving the pots off the artificial reefs, you will not cause the loss of one job in the commercial community. But by your inaction, you are causing many job losses in the recreational community because many recreational anglers have simply given up the sport they love. Loss of access to the artificial reefs plays a major role in this loss of jobs.

JCAA is asking you to scrap this bill! At the next meeting of the Assembly Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, we want you to post the Assembly version of bill S1177 that will address these problems. Passage of that bill will also allow for the restoration of funding from the US Fish and Wildlife Service to the artificial reef program.

Sincerely,
Joseph Puntasecca
President
Jersey Coast Anglers Association

JCAA's 18th Annual Fluke Tournament will be held on **June 9th, 2012**. This year we will have a new striped bass category for those of you who might like to fish for both fluke and striped bass during this time of the year. However, contestants will have to enter the fluke tournament in order to be eligible to enter the optional striped bass category. Those who enter the striped bass category will be competing only against others who are fishing out of the same port. For this category, JCAA will pay out 60% of the money taken in from each port. The entrant weighing in the heaviest striped bass for each port will receive all the cash paid out for that particular port. The entry fee for the fluke tournament is \$120 provided payment is made by 6/2/12 and \$150 after 6/2/12. The optional striped bass category entrance fee is \$50. Entrance fees cover up to six anglers per boat.

Soon you should be receiving our mailing of this year's Fluke Tournament entry forms and High Roller Raffle tickets. Mark your calendar with these two important dates, **June 9th (Fluke Tournament)** and **June 15th (Awards Ceremony)**. Now is the time to get on your phone or get to the computer and start contacting your fishing buddies. Get your crew of up to six anglers onboard with these dates. These two dates mark opportunities to fish and win big! There are 120 port prizes available to be won on June 9th. That's twelve prizes for each of the ten ports ranging from Jersey City in the north to Fortescue in the south. Each port competes against its own registered boaters and serves as its own weigh station. The heaviest fluke weighed in at the ten ports will **win \$1,200 cash 1st Place Prize!** The remaining eleven prizes can be seen on our website.

Then there's the **\$5,000 to \$10,000 Grand Prize*** (*depending on the number of entries over 500). Winning the Grand Prize at the June 15th Awards Ceremony isn't determined by who weighs in the largest fluke, nor does it matter if your crew consisted of the most highly skilled or the least experienced anglers. The odds of winning this bundle of cash and door prizes are the same for one

and all. You will automatically be entered to win provided that you or one of your crew registers at the tables outside the Trump Marina Hotel Casino Grand Cayman Ballroom. Entry forms are available at jcaa.org.

Fisheries Management & Legislative Report

By Thomas Fote

Hooked on Fishing not on Drugs moves in Senate and Assembly

The Senate Bill S178 and the Assembly Bill A638 that establishes the Hooked on Fishing-Not on Drugs Program in DEP and appropriates \$200,000 from the Drug Enforcement and Demand Reduction Fund passed out of the Senate Environmental & Energy Committee and the Assembly Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee respectively with unanimous votes. It was voted out of the Assembly Appropriations Committee and was given a second reading with amendments. It now needs to be voted on by the full Assembly. In the Senate it needs to be posted and voted on in the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee. This committee has historically been the bottleneck. It is usually the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee that has failed to take action. We have several sponsors for the bill who are on that Committee. We need to write to Senate President Stephen M. Sweeney, to the members of the Senate Committee and especially the sponsors, to make sure this bill is given a hearing in the Senate Committee. We are hopeful that Assembly Speaker Sheila Oliver will post this bill for a vote by the full Assembly. This is the fourth session this bill has been considered but never passed by both houses. You need to reach out to your elected officials in support of this bill.

Senate Budget and Appropriations members:

Chair Senator Paul Sarlo, and Vice-Chair Brian Stack, and committee members are Jennifer Beck, Anthony Bucco, Sandra Cunningham, Linda Greenstien, Kevin O'Toole, Steven Oroho, Joseph Pennacchio, Nellis Pou, Teresa Ruiz, Jeff Van Drew, Loretta Weinberg The names of sponsors are underlined.

Pots Off the Reefs

The Pots Off the Reefs Bill has been reintroduced both in the Senate and Assembly. The Senate Environment Committee Chairman Senator Bob Smith posted the Bill S1177 and it was moved out of the committee with only one negative vote. It has passed the full Senate with only 3 votes against it. Senators Gerald Cardinale, Michael Doherty and Jim Whelan all voted against the bill. Senators Jeff Van Drew and Kevin O'Tool did not vote. JCAA would like to thank Senate President Stephen Sweeney for posting S1177 so quickly and helping in its quick passage.

We no longer have to focus our attention on the Senate but need to focus all of our attention on the Assembly. We already have over 45 cosponsors in the Assembly for the companion bill A1343. Half the battle is done so we need to put the pressure on Assembly Speaker Sheila Oliver to make sure that A1343 will be heard and posted for a vote. This is the only bill that would allow for the use of the Sport Fish Restoration Fund to build artificial reefs.

Elsewhere in this newspaper, John Toth has an article that provides you with information about Assemblyman Albano's alternative bill (A-2645). It is crucial to know that this bill (A-2645) is just a delaying tactic. Instead of accomplishing anything through legislation, it sends the problem to the NJ Marine Fisheries Council. The NJ Marine Fisheries Council has 5 commercial members and 4 recreational members. The last time the Council, because of its commercial majority, failed to resolve this problem but did drag its heels for 2 – 3 years. The Council could have addressed this issue at any time and we have no faith that will happen. We don't need another delay. That is all A-2645 does. The only sponsor for this bill is Assemblyman Albano and all the Republican members of his committee abstained. Assemblyman Albano did not attempt to meet with JCAA, Reef Rescue or NJ State Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs before presenting this bill.

Since this bill passed the Senate so quickly, we can give our full attention to the Assembly to guarantee the original bill (S-1177/A-1343) is finally passed. We need to make the problems with NJ reefs part of our history, not a current problem. Assembly Speaker Sheila Oliver pulled A-2645 from the Assembly voting list on March 6th. We would like to thank her for taking this action. Now we need to work with her to help post and pass A-1343 which

JCAA & NJSFSC Testimony to the NJ Senate Budget Committee

3/21/2012

March 21, 2012

I am testifying today as the legislative chairman for the Jersey Coast Anglers Association. JCAA represents 75 recreational fishing clubs in New Jersey and it has been in existence since 1981 and the New Jersey State Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs that represent 150,000 anglers, hunters and trappers in NJ. I have been testifying before committees about fisheries issues for over 35 years as a volunteer for sportspersons of NJ. In that time one of the most crucial issues has been the lack of funding for the Bureau of Marine Fisheries. In the 1980's, Director Of Fish and Game, Russ Cookingham, the Governor and the Legislature agreed to an approximate 3.1 million dollar funding for the Bureau. This money came from state appropriations and Federal sport fish restoration money. This was before the onslaught of fisheries management plans that required extensive gathering of information and tremendous staff hours to meet the Federal and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Management Council requirements. For example, in 1981, the only regulations in effect in New Jersey that required state oversight were an 18 inch size limit and 10 fish bag limit on striped bass and a 13 inch size limit on summer flounder. In 1984, the Striped Bass Conservation Act was passed by Congress and required New Jersey to do more research and monitoring of striped bass as we implemented more stringent regulations. In the mid-90's the Atlantic Coast Conservation Act was passed. This legislation required management plans for all the inshore species that had not been regulated before. With the reauthorization of the Magnusson/Stevens Amendments in 1996, there were many additional requirements placed on the Bureau for the management of species in federal waters. We went from one management plan in 1980 to management plans for almost every species of fish harvested commercially or recreationally in New Jersey. The pressure of this increase of doing more management plans has been immense on the budget and the staff of the Bureau. In 1981, we

is the only bill that has the JCAA, Reef Rescue, NJOA, and all our member clubs support. As John Toth points out, only one recreational group spoke in favor of Assemblyman Albano's alternative bill. Today, we need to demand that our local Assemblymen and women contact Speaker Oliver and support A-1343, the bill that a majority of the Assembly, both Democrats and Republicans, cosponsor. If Assemblyman Albano is unwilling to post this bill in his committee, Speaker Oliver needs to move the bill to another committee or post it directly for a vote. It would also be appropriate to contact Speaker Oliver directly, thank her for pulling the alternative bill and ask for her help in passage of A-1343. Sample letters will be posted on the JCAA webpage.

Howard Lab Closing

Bruce Freeman, who worked at the Sandy Hook Lab for 16 years before working at the NJ Bureau of Marine Fisheries, has written an article about the history of the lab that is included in this newspaper. JCAA has joined a coalition to fight the proposed closure. We have the support of every organization in New Jersey that cares about the marine environment and recognizes the importance of the ongoing research that takes place at the lab. Within 2 years the mortgage and bonds for the lab will be retired. New Jersey could then reduce the lease payments paid by the Federal Government. This would greatly decrease the cost of maintaining the lab. JCAA will be working with our Federal legislators as well as Governor Christie and our State legislators to develop a plan to save the lab. Senators Menendez and Lautenberg and Congressman Pallone have already been working to find a funding solution. It would be appropriate to contact your Congressman and encourage him to join Congressman Pallone in his efforts to save the lab. He will be working with the budget committee and needs the support of the entire New Jersey delegation. Congressmen Rothman (9th district) and Frelinghuysen (11th district) are on the appropriations committee. It is especially important that they hear from you even if you are not in their district. JCAA will be sending alerts as necessary.

Testimony

On March 21, I will testify before the NJ Senate Budget Committee about the funding for the Division of Fish and Wildlife Bureau of Marine Fisheries. My testimony is below.

funded Marine Fisheries for about 3.1 million dollars with about 2.1 coming from state appropriations. In 2011, the Bureau of Marine Fisheries didn't even have a line item appropriation and received its only state funding from the nuclear fund. The total was less than one million dollars. Clearly the Bureau is being required to do much more with much less money and far fewer staff.

When we talk about marine fisheries in New Jersey, we need to consider the total resource. The Division of Fish and Wildlife is also responsible for oil spill response, and any other issue that impacts on the marine environment. But if we look at the just the value of the marine resource by considering just the commercial, recreational and boating industries, we are talking about 4 billion dollars in economic value. This estimate comes from the National Marine Fisheries Service figures for 2006. The boating industry data comes from Marine Trades in 2006. They estimated the boating industry was worth about 2 billion dollars to the state of New Jersey. The National Marine Fisheries Service estimated the recreational monetary value (which varies from year to year) was worth between 800 million and 1.3 billion. The commercial fishery for fin fish is worth more than 100 million dollars and shell fish, crabs and other species is worth about 400 million dollars. That represents tremendous economic value to New Jersey and many thousands of jobs both direct and indirect (tackle sales, gas, boat repair, beach fees, restaurants, and home sales or rentals in our beach and boating communities). It is also an integral part of the tourism in New Jersey. The sport fish restoration money comes from the excise tax on fishing tackle. Sales tax estimates (NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife) for hunting and fishing in New Jersey are about 120 million dollars. A large part of that money comes from the sale of fishing tackle for marine fisheries. The permits for 4 wheel drive permits for Island Beach State Park are called fishing permits. Sold for 190 dollars the over 5,000 permits generate close to 1 million dollars, more than New Jersey is currently spending on the total management of New Jersey's marine resources.

Of states that manage marine resources, New Jersey ranks LAST in funding. New Hampshire, that only manages 18 miles of coastline, spends 9 million dollars. No director since Russ Cookingham has been able to get an increase in state funding. Instead, the funding has decreased and is less than half of what it was in 1980. The only resource

currently available to the Bureau of Marine Fisheries is a state appropriation. This should come through a budget line item. The marine resource in New Jersey is of such great economic and quality of life value that the Bureau should not be treated like a stepchild. It needs its own consistent, reliable funding through a budget line item. Anything less puts New Jersey's commercial and recreational fishing industries in jeopardy.

I am one of the three Commissioners to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission and from this position I see firsthand how New Jersey is lacking the funding it needs compared to how other states funds its marine resource management. For example, NMFS has listed sturgeon as an endangered species; New Jersey will probably need to spend at least 1 million additional dollars for research to keep some of New Jersey's commercial fisheries open. Other states have the money to make this happen but not NJ. New Jersey has also just been forced to close every river in New Jersey to the harvesting of river herring because we don't have the money to do the research that is necessary to prove the herring runs are sustainable. Other states had the money and their fisheries will remain open. These are just two examples of how a lack of funds inhibits the necessary research that impacts on our availability of fish to harvest. We are now seeing examples of other states getting more favorable allocations because they can provide the research to support their management plans. You cannot allow this to happen to the recreational and commercial fishing industries of NJ. The only solution is a consistent, reliable funding for the Bureau of Marine Fisheries through a budget line item. We need sufficient funding to hire the staff and pay for the research. At the very least we need an appropriation of 3 million dollars solely for the Bureau of Marine Fisheries. We would still be at the bottom of the funding list but at least we would be headed in the right direction.

Sincerely,
Thomas Fote
Legislative Chairman
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Summer Flounder History in the JCAA Newspaper Part Four February 2008-September 2011

Fluke Season Lasts One Day in New Jersey

By Kirk Moore, Correspondent
(from *Gannett News Service*, 1/6/2008)

Shoppers will find lots of fresh New Jersey fluke in their local fish cases this week. But it won't last for long.

Fishermen who put their nets out just after midnight early this morning will get just one day's haul of 7,500 pounds out of the January commercial season for summer flounder, or fluke as it's also called, before it closes Monday. Relatively speaking, they're OK with that as a way to both conserve the resource and help fishermen survive the economic fallout.

"Our January-February season is crummy no matter what. At the same time, North Carolina opens up, so it's the lowest prices of the year," captain Jim Lovgren of the Fishermen's Dock Cooperative in Point Pleasant Beach said.

With the East Coast federal quota for flounder set at a new low of 15.77 million pounds for 2008, the agreement with state officials to conduct a one-day season will help keep enough fish available for later in the year when prices are higher, Lovgren explained.

"The bottom line is there's not enough quota. But there are enough fish," co-op manager John Cole quipped. "There should be a 30 million, 32 million-pound quota."

The annual fishing limit is set using a complex biological analysis that accounts for the species' reproductive success, and for numbers of flounder taken by fishermen. Weeks of uncertainty ended New Year's Eve when the National Marine Fisheries Service published a final rule setting the 15.77 million-pound limit for commercial and recreational fluke catches. Under pressure

The agency had been under pressure from environmental activists to set a lower quota limit, 11.64 million pounds, which scientific advisers had recommended as a way to speed progress toward a

goal of nearly doubling the flatfish population by 2013.

"We're disappointed. For precautionary reasons, they should have adopted the recommendations" of advisers, said Lee Crockett, who heads federal fisheries reform efforts with the environmental arm of the Pew Charitable Trusts.

"They're hanging their hat on more optimistic scenarios that haven't panned out in the past," Crockett added. "So we'll see what happens."

Fishing advocates doubt further enormous growth is achievable in the fluke spawning stock and say the economic consequences of trying are just too much for the commercial and recreational industries to bear. The controversy has so split environmental and recreational groups, one influential national organization, the Marine Fish Conservation Network, could not agree on the quota, network executive director Bruce J. Stedman said.

"There was a wide diversity of opinion on the subject so we chose not to comment," Stedman said of the public comment period that led up to the NMFS decision. "So in this case, our individual members are speaking for themselves."

One longtime network member, the Jersey Coast Anglers Association, argued strenuously in December against the network taking a position in favor of the lower quota, said Thomas P. Fote, the JCAA's legislative chairman. Strong case

The New Jersey recreational anglers' arguments won over the International Game Fishing Association and American Sportfishing Association.

"Had we not been at the table, the network would have sent a letter to NMFS that reflected the positions of some of their members who don't fish and lack understanding about recreational issues," Fote wrote in his group's January newsletter. It's a prime example of why recreational groups should stay engaged with the environmental movement, even when the two sides disagree, he says.

The exact 2008 fluke rules for New Jersey's recreational anglers will be worked out before the season starts in May. It's one of the most crucial parts of the party and charter boat business, where summer flounder accounts for about 40 percent of the trade, according to industry advocates.

"We're going ahead on flounder," said Dick Herb, a Cape May charter captain and member of the state Marine Fisheries Council as the group met Thursday in Galloway. Proposals to impose across-the-board fishing limits were defeated and states can

still set their season and catch limits within the federal quota, he said.

But with good weather forecast, boats will be out of the gate today, fighting for a share of the market with diesel fuel high at \$3 a gallon, and flounder prices at the dock likely to be around \$2 a pound to the boats, fishermen said.

"Tons and tons of fluke out there. It should be going to the people," said Jesus Sante, a captain with two boats at the co-op and 55 years of experience fishing out of Spain, Africa and the Americas. "I've got \$1 million at the dock here. Who's going to pay my bills?"

Regulators Make Fluke Anglers Very Anxious

By John Geiser, Correspondent

Every day that is crossed off the calendar from now on leaves fluke anglers increasingly worried about what the regulators will allow them to fish for this year.

John Toth, president of the Jersey Coast Anglers Association, got some attention on the problems of the fluke fishery when he addressed the December joint meeting of the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's summer flounder, scup and black sea bass board.

"After testimony from the angling community who protested about how these regulations are ruining the industry, and this testimony seemed to fall on deaf ears, I decided to take a different tactic," he said.

"I told the management councils that they should impose the lowest quota, stop fishing during July or August, and close the fluke season for all of next year (2009)," Toth said. "This way, in a few years down the road, the waters will be teeming with fluke, but there will be no marinas left or boats to fish for them since they will all be out of business." I said this is the scary scenario we are facing with marinas already in financial trouble . . . developers would love to buy them to make high-priced condos that adjoining towns would like to see for increased rates," Toth said. "Once these marinas are gone, they are not coming back."

Toth also told the two management bodies that, while management must fashion rules to abide by the Magnuson-Stevens Act, it also is incumbent

on them to inform Congress that these regulations are destroying the fishing industry.

He emphasized that there needs to be a pause in the enforcement of these regulations to see if more flexibility can be incorporated in them.

Toth finished his testimony with the repeated warning: "We all see a train wreck coming, and that something needs to be done to stop it."

Toth also said that, during testimony at the hearing, it was mentioned that, despite the fact that the National Marine Fisheries Service has the final say on regulations, not one study has ever been done by NMFS and other management bodies on the socioeconomic impacts of their regulations on the angling community.

This, in fact, is not true, but it is wholly accurate in substance. NMFS, in particular, is always careful to include a few lines in most plans about the socioeconomic impacts it has evaluated.

This is designed as shirrtails to cover them when a judge or congressman happens to start shuffling through the pages of the plan.

The trouble is that they always find that the impact will be hardly noticeable or it is has been determined that there will be no impact.

The latest analysis of proposed fluke cutbacks, for instance, is that strict regulations will not affect angler participation, and impact on the party and charter boat industry will be negligible.

The JCAA, like so many other organizations, trusts neither the data nor the techniques that drive the management process, and Toth said it will do more than talk about it.

"The JCAA membership has recently approved \$15,000 for the hiring of several scientists to evaluate the information and the analytical techniques used by the National Marine Fisheries Service in developing stock assessment for fluke quotas in 2008," he said.

The scientists expected to participate include Bruce L. Freeman, former marine research scientist with the state Division of Fish and Wildlife; Dr. Eric Powell and Dr. Ken Able, both of Rutgers University; and Dr. Brian Rothschild, University of Massachusetts.

Toth stressed that the JCAA supports a complete and independent review of the statistics and methods used to determine fluke stocks, and NMFS has agreed to a benchmark review of the information and analysis that goes into the setting of fluke quotas. This will be done in June.

"Our group of scientists will be participating in it (Benchmark Assessment Workshop)," he said. "More money most likely will be needed to fund this project and other fishing groups have expressed interest in assisting us."

Fisheries Management & Legislative Report

By Tom Fote

(from JCAA September 2008 Newsletter)

Summer Flounder, Black Seabass and Scup

Bruce Freeman and I have included our thoughts on the MAFMC Science and Statistical Committee and Monitoring Committee meetings in the press release below. I could not attend the joint meeting of MAFMC and ASMFC when they voted on the quotas for summer flounder, black sea bass and scup for 2009. John Toth and Bruce Freeman were there and briefed me on the meeting.

I was very disappointed that the NMFS Northeast Regional Director Pat Kurkel opposed 19.02 million pounds for summer flounder that was approved by the SSC and the Monitoring Committee. She knows the 19.02 represents significant conservation and significant probability of maintaining the goals of the plan. It can only appear that NMFS remains hell bent on destroying the recreational fishery for summer flounder. For many years NMFS personnel, both on and off the record, have stated that limiting recreational fishing is one of NMFS' goals. What better way to accomplish this goal than to make people so disgusted with the limits that they give up fishing altogether and find other pursuits. They have already driven party boats, tackle stores and charter boats out of business and chased away hundreds of thousands of anglers. This may be the only success they can claim!

At the joint meeting they also voted to greatly reduce the black sea bass quota. They know that there is no approved stock assessment for black sea bass or scup and we are not closer to having one than when I advocated for the stock assessment as the Governor's Appointee to ASMFC in 1992. What is even more disturbing is the fact that they are retiring NMFS former research vessel and bringing a new one on line. The information gathered by the original vessel is what NMFS uses to establish the present quotas since it is the "best science" they have available. They are currently trying to develop a

mathematical model that will allow comparisons between the information gathered by both boats. One wonders why they bother since the information has been rejected for use in setting quotas for years.

Some people might think I am being hard on NMFS and ASMFC but both of these groups knew we had problems with these stock assessments in the early 90's. Now in 2008 they have not spent the money or effort required to develop reliable stock assessment data. NMFS always has their fall-back position – the "best science available." That means we are stuck with lousy science again and again. We could joke about their failings except that their decisions have a negative impact on the lives of many of our citizens.

JCAA Press Release

MAFMC Science and Statistical Committee (SSC) and Monitoring Committee Meeting

Bruce Freeman and I attended the Mid-Atlantic Marine Fisheries Management Council Science and Statistical Committee (SSC) and Monitoring Committee Meetings. This SSC meeting represented the SSC's first opportunity to set the total allowable catch for scup, summer flounder, sea bass and bluefish. It was an interesting process to observe. Bruce and I were the only recreational people in the audience for the two days of meetings. There were also some commercial fishermen from Virginia and North Carolina and Greg DiDomenico from Garden Seafood Association in attendance for the SSC meeting. Because of the scheduling and the short notice, many members of the SSC were not in attendance. I had expected to see a more diverse group of SSC members, representing universities and the states. However, I was surprised to find that many of the SSC members are NMFS employees. These members were for the most part from other regions of the country but I am still concerned that they are part of the NMFS system. State governments generally develop committees for monitoring that have at least the perception of independence and objectivity. We all know how important perception is to the acceptance of any decisions. I am not questioning the integrity of any of the committee members, I am just concerned about the public perception about the decisions they will make.

The benchmark assessment did accept a higher mortality rate than the plan is currently using. I want to point out some important information. In

reviewing how the new stock assessment impacts on the fisheries management plan for summer flounder, I asked, "When we are fully recovered and we reach the new goal, what is the maximum sustainable yield we can harvest?" To my surprise, the answer was 28.2 million pounds. In 2005 the quota was as high as 30 million pounds. We still had stringent regulations in place in most of the states. Even with the new plan using the new mortality rates, we're never going to be allowed to harvest 30 million pounds under the current system. When I looked at some of the earlier recreational catch figures, we were as high as 12 million pounds in the mid 90's. For the most part that was on 14 inch fish. We are now going to harvest 1/3 the number of fish. They will be bigger fish, mainly females but that means the success rate for the average angler will be down considerably. It also means that the hook and release mortality will probably grow. The thing that is driving this whole system which is so unusual and is causing all the problems is that even with having a spawning stock biomass almost 5 times what it was in 1994, we have not increased recruitment based on available surveys. The bottom line is that as we have increased the spawning stock biomass we have not seen an increase in recruitment. This is totally outside of what we would normally and historically expect and should cause us to reexamine all of the factors that may be impacting on summer flounder. On a positive note, members of the benchmark stock assessment and the SSC have acknowledged that there is currently no reliable relationship between spawning stock biomass and recruitment. The problem remains, what to do next. We need to fill the data gaps with new scientific, environmental and biological information. That new data will allow us to use the model to develop appropriate projects and ultimately appropriate quotas. My bachelors and masters degrees are not in biology but in business. In business school we learned that money spent developing reliable projections is money well spent. The only way to do reliable projections is to invest in the data.

The SSC and Monitoring Committee report on bluefish contained few changes. The biggest change is that the recreational projections are forecasting that we will maximize or exceed our quota. There will be no transfer of unused recreational quota to the commercial quota under these recommendations. The committees' recommendations are status quo for scup but calls

for a reduction in the sea bass fishery by 50%. I cannot tell you what those reductions will be if this proposal is accepted by the Council and ASMFC because we don't know yet what this year's recreational catch is.

The SSC has expressed the same frustration on sea bass and scup that Bruce and I have experienced since 1992. In 1992 the Council and Commission proposed fishery management plans for sea bass and scup and indicated we would have a stock assessment available. It is now 2008 and we still don't have a valid stock assessment for either species. The SSC recognizes that it is questionable to base a plan and quotas without a valid stock assessment. I wish, with the passage of the new Federal Law, I could promise you that in the immediate future we would have a peer reviewed stock assessment. I am not confident that will happen.

Below is Bruce Freeman's report on Summer Flounder. A more detailed report will be available after the Council and Commission make their decisions next August 5 & 6.

Bruce Freeman's Report on Summer Flounder

The Science and Statistical Committee (SSC) met July 31 to review recommendations of the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's staff (Council) concerning the fishery quotas for fluke, bluefish, sea bass and scup for 2009. Recent additions to the Federal Fishery Law now require the SSC to review changes in annual quotas to make certain they are supported by the best scientific information. In addition, the Council must follow the recommendations of the SSC.

The SSC agreed with the recently completed assessment of the coastwide fluke stock that supports a change to the model used as well as change to a key variable used in the predictive fishery model. These changes, together with the most recent survey data, now indicate that the fluke stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. This means that the fluke resource is more than 75% restored to its maximum sustainable level and at the existing catch rate, we should see a complete recovery of the fluke spawning stock to 151 million pounds by the fall of 2012. Federal Law requires the stock to be rebuilt no later than 2013.

The SSC recommended a total allowable catch level for the 2009 fishing year of 19 million pounds which is divided among recreational

fishermen (7.6 million pounds) and commercial fishermen (11.4 million pounds).

The 2008 coastwide recreational fishery has been held to about 6 million pounds because of concern that the fluke stock will not be fully restored over the next 4 years. The updated analysis and change in model variables now indicate the stock is more improved than previously indicated and that the recreational catch for 2009 could possibly be increased to 7.4 million pounds, a 19% increase, yet be fully restored by 2013.

Fisheries Management & Legislative Report

By Tom Fote

(from JCAA March 2011 Newsletter)

Summer Flounder

As you read in the President's Report, we now have the summer flounder options. Please read that column before the next meeting so JCAA can take a position.

I want to focus on the Connecticut 2011 Summer Flounder proposal. One of the options Connecticut proposed is a smaller fish allowed for shore-based anglers. This is something JCAA has been calling for, for years. When we raise size limits on any species, the most affected are the shore-based anglers. That includes our fellow anglers who can't afford a boat, a charter or a party boat ticket. This is a man, woman or child who stands on a dock and tries to catch something they can take home to eat. We have greatly limited their ability to do so. The larger fish are not so available at the dock, in the canal, on the pier or from the shore. They are also the anglers who have not caused any of these problems because of their limited ability to target the fish where they are feeding, spawning or congregating. Connecticut considered the data that showed that they had basically eliminated the shore-based anglers from taking home summer flounder. I am hoping that in 2012, after looking at the results of the Connecticut pilot project, ASMFC and all the federal fisheries management councils will make this a coastwide priority. New Jersey needs to look at the same type of proposals for many of its managed species. We need to stop using discriminatory fisheries management practices. I was proud to make the motion and fight for its passage.

Fisheries Management & Legislative Report

By Tom Fote

(from JCAA September 2011 Newsletter)

Joint Meeting

I have included this year's quotas and motions below. Every year I come home from this exercise even more discouraged than I was the year before. We keep rebuilding stocks to all time high levels and yet we are not allowed to fish as if the stocks were recovered. We did get increases in the overall quotas for summer flounder and scup. Because of the omnibus amendment passed by the Mid-Atlantic Council, I am not sure what the actual increases will be. The jump in the scup quota will actually give us some opportunity to change the regulations in New Jersey.

Summer Flounder

Some people will be praising the quota increase but it will not be as great as it seems for the recreational fishery. Because of the omnibus amendment, when we set the quota for the recreational catch limits in December, there will be more factors to deduct from the approved quota. The recreational sector will have their quota reduced because of the regulatory discards forced on them by the crazy regulations. Summer flounder was never meant to be a catch and release fishery. This is a fishery that is for catch and eat, not catch and release like other fisheries. The ASMFC and the Mid-Atlantic Council have turned this into a fishery in which the regulatory discards equal the amount of fish kept by the recreational sector. This is unacceptable in a fishery that is not a primary catch and release fishery. We now release a large number of fish to get one keeper. It gets worse each year and nothing is done. We talk a lot, we make suggestions but nothing happens. Because of these onerous regulations we are now forced to kill at least one fish for every one we take home. In my opinion, the quota is way below what is appropriate and the abundance of fish sets up the recreational community for failure. If I was a teacher grading the NMFS on their management for summer flounder, they would get an "F". We have rebuilt the stocks because of the sacrifice of both the recreational and commercial communities but nowhere do we see any benefit from this sacrifice. The sacrifice gets lost in all the wrong data. What we should be looking at is the

actual number of summer flounder anglers take home to eat. At most, we now take home less than a quarter of the fish we used to because the regulations require us to keep larger fish. The anglers who catch a big fish take one home but the majority of the anglers are forced to catch and release. The shore-based anglers are taking almost no fish home because of the size restrictions. We have virtually eliminated the pier, the canal and the beach anglers. You should not manage fisheries by playing one group of anglers against another.

recipe for disaster in 2013 if NJ were to go over quota in 2012. We also feel the reduced bag limit and season to gain a half an inch is not worth losing and therefore support Option 2 to enable our anglers the greatest opportunity to catch summer flounder and also reduce pressure on other species by keeping the summer flounder season open when others are closed.

The Fluke Controversy

By Bruce Freeman

JCAA Testimony before the NJ Marine Fisheries Council on Black Sea Bass & Summer Flounder

JCAA Black Sea Bass Position

Jersey Coast's member clubs met on Tuesday and held a lengthy discussion on the merits of each of the options presented. As with all JCAA positions and decisions, a member club makes a motion, the issue is discussed and a vote is taken.

We urge the Council to liberalize black sea bass by the full 57% approved by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. In the past NJ has endured drastic reductions in black sea bass. If the ASMFC moves to a state-by-state quota system, NJ will be forced into a quota based on historically low landings due to the recent reductions in quota over the past few years. NJ needs to get its landings up as much as possible to avoid such a situation and take full advantage of what the ASMFC will allow us to catch. In the event the Council does not adopt a regulation that takes advantage of the full 57% liberalization allowed, we are forced to support Option B.

JCAA Summer Flounder Position

Jersey Coast's member clubs met on Tuesday and held a lengthy discussion on the merits of each of the options presented. As with all JCAA positions and decisions, a member club makes a motion, the issue is discussed and a vote is taken.

As much as we would like to see the size limit reduced at this time we do not feel that would be a prudent decision. With the possibility of a very strong year class becoming available for landings, we feel a reduced minimum size with a reduced bag limit from the current eight fish bag limit could be a

During the past several months, Tom Fote has re-run 11 years of summer flounder (Fluke) articles published in the JCAA newspaper. After reading these, it seems that the only point that can be agreed upon is that any management decision made concerning Fluke will be controversial. Why is this? How can there be so much disagreement between what fishermen see occurring while on the water and what the population dynamic models determine to be necessary in order to maintain the Fluke population at sustainable levels? Surely a species as common to New Jersey and New York waters and as important to both recreational and commercial fishermen as Fluke must have been studied so intensively that we know all the details of its natural history, biological traits, and migratory habits. Surprisingly, this is not the case. While we know many aspects about its natural history and biological traits, there are many more we do not know and this can be part of the problem of the ongoing controversy. But there are other concerns as to the cause of this controversy.

Our existing management system is based upon the estimated size of the fish population in question and whether that population is increasing or decreasing. In simplistic terms, biologists take into account all of the variables which are known to influence a fish population and relegate them to a mathematical equation or model. Variables such as the estimated population at some point in time are used together with the numbers that are caught each year by fishermen, both commercial and recreational, as well as the number of fish killed incidentally, but not landed. These last types of mortality are referred to as fishing mortality. Another factor in the mathematical equation is the rate of mortality due to predation, disease, and old age. These are termed natural mortality. Other

factors in the equation include the estimated rate of growth which is always occurring in a population, and the amount of newly hatched fish which are entering the population, termed recruits. As can be seen from this simplistic example, some of these variables act to increase the population while others act to decrease it. Once all the variables are determined, the mathematical equation is solved and the answer provided. It is that answer which serves as the basis for the annual quotas. If a model accurately characterizes the fish population in question, the results are a true representation of the status of that fish stock. However, if the model does not accurately characterize the model, the results can be a misrepresentation of the stock and result in a controversy.

There are several important conditions that can influence the final mathematical answer or model results. The first is how accurate the estimates are for each of the variables. If they accurately depict the variables, fine, but if they do not, they can consistently produce misleading results. The second condition is the mathematical equation or model itself. Models are being modified and updated all the time as biologists learn more of the complexities and interactions of the variables. As models change, the model results change. An example of this occurred in 2008 when the model being used was changed from the virtual population analysis (VPA) to a forward projecting model (ASAP). This change in addition to a revised natural mortality rate and biological reference points resulted in a substantial change in the Fluke stock status. The third condition is the rate used for natural mortality, a variable that is often difficult to measure. However, a small change to the rate to natural mortality can have considerable influence on the final results.

So far as Fluke are concerned, there remain some continuing limitations which underlie basic assumptions used in the model. Unlike most fish populations where we find a direct relationship between the number or weight (biomass) of mature females and the resulting number of young fish being recruited into the population, this does not seem to hold true for Fluke. For example, over the past several years as a biomass of mature females has more than doubled, the number of recruits moving into the population has not increased, but remained about the same. In several cases, the largest number of recruits were produced from a population having a very low female biomass.

In addition to this, we find a skewed sex ratio, especially in mature fish. While there is a 1:1 sex ratio in immature Fluke, as they reach maturity within the second or third year of life, females dominate over males and starting by the fourth or fifth year of life, females account for 95-98% of the population.

In order to understand the implications of these biological oddities and how they affect the results of population models, JCAA joined with other recreational fishing organizations, commercial fishing organizations, and Rutgers and Cornell universities to form a not-for-profit multi-state multi-institutional partnership named the Partnership for Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Science (PMAFS). The purpose of this partnership is to address the most urgent scientific problems limiting the successful management of fisheries in the mid-Atlantic region. PMAFS is designed to provide the framework enabling these institutions and concerned industry groups to effectively address the most urgent scientific problems in fisheries management and incorporate this critical information into the management process through partnerships with NMFS, the mid-Atlantic Council and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. PMAFS requested funding from Congress and with the support of both New Jersey and New York congressional delegations, received them. To date the following studies had been initiated:

1. Determining the sex ratio of the recreational and commercial landings
2. Determining the natural mortality of males and females
3. Determining the sex ratio of Fluke from survey data
4. Conducting a comprehensive evaluation of biological reference points
5. Collecting information on egg production and egg condition (these may be a better indicator of stock productivity than female biomass alone)

As these projects are concluded, we should have much better information to apply to the stock assessment model and hopefully resolve many of the current controversies.

NMFS to Close the Sandy Hook Marine Lab

By Bruce Freeman

Fishermen reacted in shock and disbelief when the National Marine Fishery Service (NMFS) announced its plan to close the James J. Howard Marine Laboratory at Sandy Hook. It was just last September that the director of NMFS spoke of the importance of the Lab and the fishery research being done there, as he joined other dignitaries and the public in celebrating the laboratory's 50th anniversary.

The rapid growth in recreational fishing during the 1950s, as well as the public's ever increasing desire for understanding about the life habits of marine fishes and their environmental requirements, prompted the federal government to take action. It did so in early 1960. The Department of Interior's Bureau of Sport Fisheries set out to establish a nationwide system of research facilities devoted to fishes of interest to anglers. The very first such facility was the Sandy Hook Marine Laboratory. The Bureau chose one of its distinguished fishery scientists, L.A. Walford, to select a location and hire its staff. After its modest beginning in a reconditioned US Army hospital overlooking Sandy Hook Bay, the enthusiastic staff developed innovative research programs that set a high standard of accomplishment.

For example, a team of biologists began a series of behavioral studies concentrating on bluefish, tautog and fluke to determine how environmental factors such as water temperature and the amount of daylight governed activities such as swimming speed and feeding rates. Other biologists initiated the first coastwide tagging study to determine the migration pattern of bluefish. Still others began the first coastwide age and growth study of bluefish. Other biologists carried out the first long term, multiyear systematic survey of fish eggs and larvae occurring off the coast from Cape Cod to Cape Hatteras. Others set out to find answers to continuing questions posed by sport fishermen about the occurrence and migration of large sharks commonly found offshore of New Jersey and New York. This study developed into the first coastwide cooperative tagging study of large pelagic fishes.

Other biologists collected year-round ocean water temperatures and correlated them with the occurrence and distribution of various fishes. Still another team conducted the first large-scale systematic study of the feasibility of using different types of material for the construction of artificial reefs, as well as monitoring the biological transition rate of organisms living on the various types of artificial reef material after it was deployed in ocean water. Other biologists set out to more accurately determine the number of recreational anglers that fished in marine and estuarine waters each year and their resulting recreational catch. This last program was expanded in scope and continually improved upon and is carried on today as the NMFS's nationwide Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). Other programs such as cooperative shark tagging continues today as an example of how fishermen working directly with biologists can be an effective way to help understand the migratory habits of pelagic species which have both national and international implications.

The commitment to establish a nationwide system of sport fish research facilities expanded from Sandy Hook to include others in New England (Narragansett, RI), the Gulf of Mexico (Panama City, FL), and the Pacific Coast (Tiburon, CA). For a decade or so these research facilities flourished, but unfortunately as the federal agencies went through a series of reorganizations, what today is the National Marine Fishery Service was shifted from one department to another and the federal government's commitment to recreational fisheries became weakened amongst other priorities, or even worse, neglected all together. One by one the sport fish labs were given other responsibility and their original mission became lost - all but Sandy Hook. Now, not only has the NMFS sought to change the mission of the Sandy Hook Lab, but, under its most recent proposal, to eliminate it entirely as a cost saving measure!

This decision is made under the umbrella of budget requirements to cut federal costs yet maintain key priorities. The NMFS contends that this closure meets its core mission priority by supplying the science that informs management decisions and reflects long term investment in scientific capacity. This was one of the principal reasons for the establishment of the Lab to begin with, but now this philosophy is being used as justification for its closure.

The great irony of the decision to close the Lab is the commitment by the Administrator of NOAA, the parent agency of NMFS, made several years ago that much more attention needed to be given to recreational fishing. Holding to that commitment, she had her agency organize a national symposium where recreational groups could voice their views as to what is needed to be done for recreational fishing. She has continued to honor that commitment and organized an advisory group to help NMFS develop a recreational fishery plan of action for each region of the country as well as have each of the regional offices assign a fulltime recreational fishery coordinator to make certain the action plans are carried out. During the same time that these action plans were being developed, NMFS was working to improve the accuracy and timeliness of the recreational catch and effort data that was collected nationwide. It appears that the commitment made by NMFS to expand programs directly related to recreational fishing has not been communicated to those in the agency who propose to close Sandy Hook.

Almost as soon as the Fiscal Year 2013 Budget was released and which included the closure of Sandy Hook, Senators Lautenberg and Menendez and Congressman Pallone sent a letter to President Obama indicating they will work to prevent such a closure during the upcoming appropriations process. JCAA will work in any way it can with our legislators to maintain the Laboratory. We encourage all fishermen to do the same.

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