

**RI Marine Fisheries Council
Tautog Advisory Panel
Meeting Minutes
February 6, 2012 - 6:00 PM
URI Bay Campus, Hazard Room**

R. Hittinger, Chair
M. Bucko*
E. Cook ^A
G. Tremblay
P. Hearvy
J. Rainone
G. Latos*

F. Blount^A
G. Oakley*
C. Donilon
J. Carvalho
P. Karcz*
M. Lanni*

2 other attendees, signature illegible Jason McNamee, RIDFW
(*primary advisory panel member; ^A alternate member)

R. Hittinger began the meeting. He stated that J. McNamee from the Division of Fish and Wildlife (Division or DFW) had a presentation (see attached) which covered the first 4 agenda topics. He went on to state that after the presentation the panel would move on to discuss any proposals they may have for either commercial or recreational tautog management in 2012.

J. McNamee began his presentation with a review of the 2011 commercial fishery. The fishery had an overage in the spring sub period but they came in under the quota for the year by approximately 1,800 lbs. He stated that dealer reporting seemed to be improving, certainly in the tautog fishery. The summer sub period catch rates were relatively high but slowed down and did not close prematurely. The fall fishery was on par with recent history and for the year. He concluded with a slide showing that the commercial fishery only represents about 8% of the total state tautog harvest. J. McNamee stated that the DFW was not proposing any changes to the commercial fishery.

J. McNamee went on to discuss recreational fishery performance in 2011 as well as recent history. He gave some perspective on the fishery by breaking the data down to wave specific and mode specific data. The summary of this information is that the large harvest spikes are occurring in the later waves, 5 and 6, and that the majority of the landings (81%) are occurring in the private/rental boat mode. The regional virtual population analysis (VPA) assessment indicated that the F rate in the region had decreased as of the terminal year 2009. J. McNamee also showed the panel information from a RI only biomass dynamic model (BDM) that had been developed by M. Gibson, which also indicated a similar trend, but had the advantage of a terminal year of 2010, where the BDM indicated deteriorating stock status. He also showed info from the Narragansett Bay Seine Survey, which indicated poor recruitment for the past several years. One important piece of information that he wanted to discuss with the group was the rollout of the new Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) recreational harvest information. Very briefly, the MRIP information simply took the existing

recreational data and used improved statistical techniques to reanalyze the catch data. The program would have elements added to it over the coming years (i.e. the recreational registry information) and its use would continue to evolve in the coming seasons. The way this shakes out for RI with regard to tautog was that there were dramatic shifts in harvest for RI since 2004, but these shifts did not indicate a trend, sometimes MRIP was the higher estimate, and sometimes MRFSS was the higher estimate. One of the more dramatic years was 2010, which showed extremely high harvest. It is unclear at this point how this new information would be integrated into the regional assessment for tautog, but J. McNamee was under the impression that a workshop would be held in March and based on the guidance from this group, the tautog assessments (both regional and coastwide) would be adjusted accordingly. A second important piece of information was that the 2011 harvest estimate for RI was extremely low. J. McNamee had asked J. Lake of the DFW to investigate this harvest number as there was no way the harvest could be as low as was currently being indicated, even given the fact that the data did not include wave 6. J. McNamee finished by indicating that the DFW was not proposing any changes to the recreational regulations for the 2012 season. RI and MA were given an exemption from the 56% reduction requirements of addendum 6 that the rest of the coastal states had to abide by due to the stock status as indicated by the approved regional assessment.

R. Hittinger asked if there were any comments, questions, or alternate proposals from the meeting participants to change tautog management in the tautog fishery in 2012. M. Lanni asked a question about how targets work in this fishery. J. McNamee stated that it was different than for a species like summer flounder. There was no target per se; the reductions that needed to be taken by the other states were to achieve an F target, rather than a harvest target. RI and MA had to try and achieve the F target as indicated by the regional assessment rather than the coastwide assessment.

M. Bucko stated that since stock status in our area was in good shape, the group should think about raising the private boat limit from 10 to 12 fish. The panel had recommended this in the previous year, but he had been opposed to it at that time, but now that they were in a situation where the local stock status had improved, making the vessel limit 12 fish would make it even with the per person bag limits and he felt would create a minimal impact.

G. Tremblay stated that one of the reasons the panel had supported the 10 fish vessel limit last year was because it created parity with the commercial fishery. He thought if there were two different vessel limits applying within the state, it would lead to enforcement difficulties. Because of this he did not recommend raising the vessel limit from 10 to 12 fish. Later in the discussion G. Tremblay noted that just because people were cheating didn't mean you have to make the regulation less restrictive to appease them. He gave the example that you don't raise the speed limit to 80 mph just because lots of people drive 80 mph in a 65 mph zone.

F. Blount also cautioned about raising this limit. Based on the eRec data that they looked at he concluded that almost every recorded vessel was limiting out, therefore raising the limit would increase harvest, potentially in a significant way. He stated that he was not

advocating for any position but thought that info could help the discussion. It was brought up at that point that the eRec information included an abundance of party boat information, where they did not have a vessel limit in place, so the data didn't necessarily indicate that everyone was limiting out.

G. Oakley stated that he would support raising the boat limit to 12 fish. He didn't think they needed to worry as much about parity with the commercial harvest limit and he thought being able to split the fish up evenly relative to the per person bag limit would be a benefit. Later in the discussion M. Bucko offered support for not needing to have similar bag limits for both commercial and recreational.

At this point, R. Hittinger wanted to take a vote on the proposal offered by M. Bucko:

Raise the private vessel limit from 10 fish to 12 fish.

The panel voted 3 to approve and 3 opposed. There were 7 panel members present so there was 1 abstention.

M. Lanni asked for a little clarification as to why there was an abstention. J. Rainone stated that he didn't vote because of two reasons. First he felt that enforcement of the vessel limit was inadequate as he personally witnessed an abundance of cheating on this regulation in 2011, so he felt he didn't want to change a regulation that wasn't being enforced in the first place. He went on to say that given the uncertainty surrounding the 2011 estimate, he felt it was premature to talk about liberalizing. Were the 2011 estimate to be confirmed lower, he would accept a small increase in the vessel limit.

F. Blount introduced another topic for discussion by the group. He felt that RI was going to become extremely attractive to out of state fishermen, particularly party and charter vessels given the very restrictive measures being put in place in other states and the fact that RI has very low recreational license requirements and very low party and charter vessel licensing fees. The requirements to fish in party and charter mode in RI were no hindrance to out of state vessels and were an order of magnitude cheaper than what the cost was in surrounding states. There was further discussion on this such as increasing the fees for out of state party and charter vessels.

Due to the earlier confusion of who was voting and why others were abstaining, **R. Hittinger introduced a vote on remaining at status quo. The panel members voted 4 to approve remaining at status quo and 3 opposed to this.** R. Hittinger noted that since the votes were very close, the information would be conveyed that the panel was split in their decision on whether to remain at status quo or increase the vessel limit to 12 fish.

There was some additional discussion at this point on the harvest estimates for RI. F. Blount suggested that while the DFW is investigating the harvest numbers for 2011, they should also look in to the wave 5 estimate for 2010, as this had gone up dramatically from the MRFSS estimate. J. McNamee stated that he would forward this recommendation to J. Lake at the DFW.

J. Carvalho wanted to make a commercial fishery proposal. He stated that it was an inequity for people who depend on commercial fishing to provide them access to the fish when they are unable to purchase a locally caught tautog for the majority of the year. He felt it was mismanagement of the resource to allow recreational fishermen access to the tautog resource to the disadvantage of those RI residents who can not purchase a tautog for most of the year. J. Carvalho added that short openings and frequent closings are not a good marketing strategy and occur to the disadvantage of fishermen and the state. Because of the low quota, he stated that this was only a bycatch fishery for most fishermen in the state, and he made the following proposal for the 2012 commercial fishery:

Make the 2012 commercial fishery the same seasons and the same bag limit as the recreational fishery. He felt that if it was necessary, they should raise the quota to accommodate this.

There was discussion on this proposal by the group, much of which was to clarify the proposal, whether it was the per person limit or the vessel limit. J. Carvalho stated that it should be exactly the same as the recreational program, so it would be per license holder with a maximum of 10 fish at any open period of time. R. Hittinger made the comment that J. Carvalho was not an official member of the panel but since the panel had such poor attendance from other commercial fishermen, he appreciated getting a commercial perspective on the fishery, and this was why he allowed J. Carvalho to make his proposal. However, R. Hittinger stated that he did not feel the proposal was ready to be voted on at this point given that the panel had no information on what this approach might do with regard to increasing harvest.

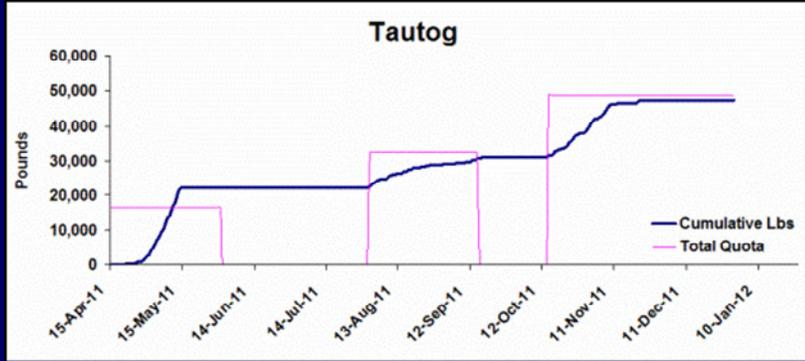
R. Hittinger adjourned the meeting.

Summary of Rhode Island Commercial Tautog Fishery

2011



Commercial Landings



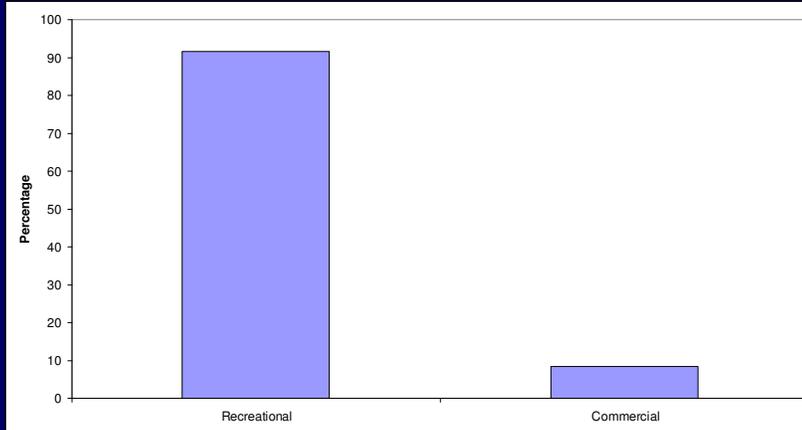
- Overage in Spring of 5,661 lbs
- Underage of 1,847 lbs for year

Commercial Quota

| Period | Period Allocation | Quota Allocation |
|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Year 2011 | | 51,348 lbs |
| Apr 15 – May 31 | 33.3% | 17,116 lbs |
| Jul 15 – Aug 29 | 33.3% | 17,116 lbs |
| Oct 15 – Dec 31 | 33.3% | 17,116 lbs |
| | | 51,348 lbs |



Commercial Proportion of the Harvest



- Commercial represents 8% of Recreational Harvest
- Does not include 2011

Division of Fish and Wildlife Proposed Changes

- The RI Division of Fish and Wildlife proposes no changes to the commercial fishery in 2012
 - Commercial landings are constrained by a quota
 - Only represents approximately 9% of the total state harvest of tautog

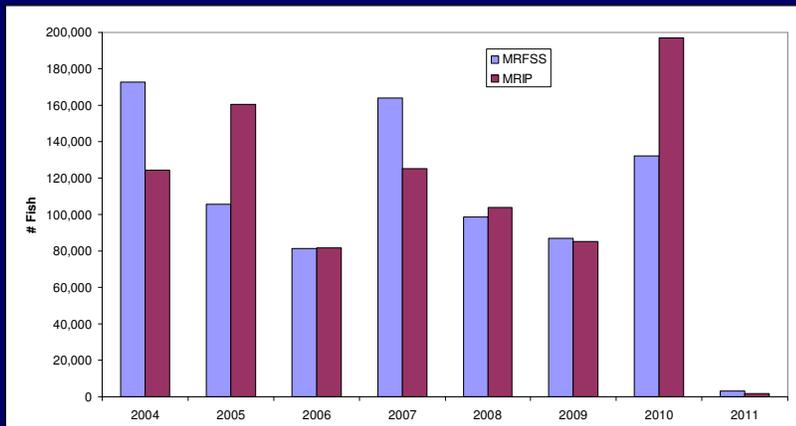


Summary of Rhode Island Recreational Tautog Fishery

2011



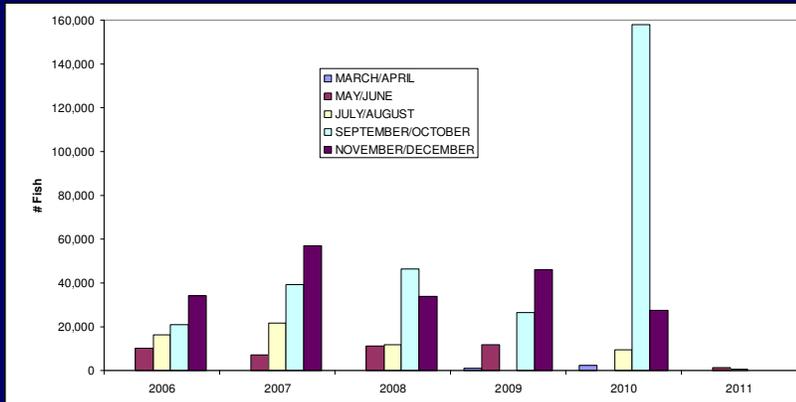
Recreational Landings



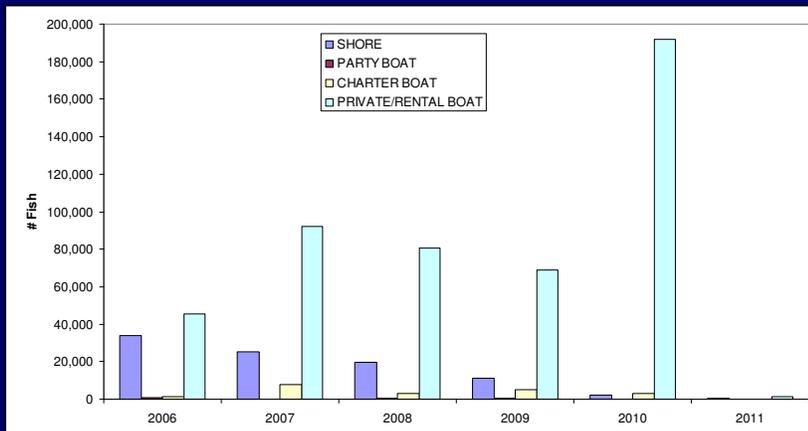
.Note 2011 missing wave 6 data



Recreational Landings – Harvest by Waves



Recreational Landings – Harvest by Mode



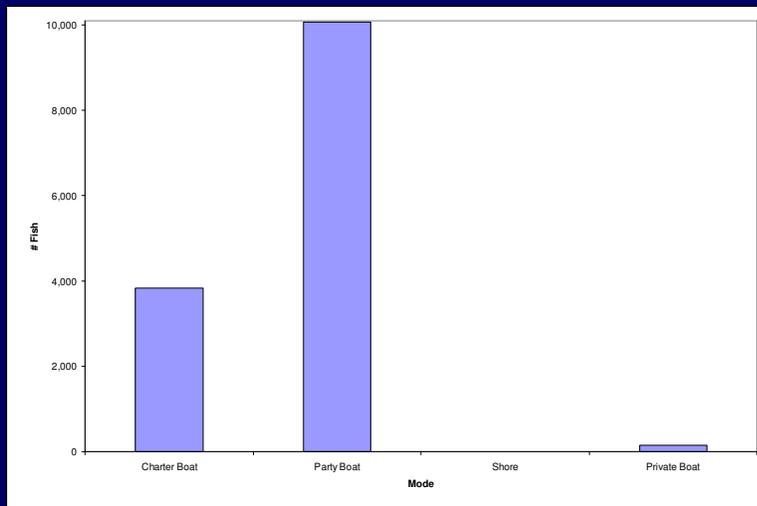
- Average 2006 – 2010:
- .Shore Mode represents 16%
 - .Party Mode 0.3%
 - .Charter Modes (combined) represent 3%
 - .Private/Rental Mode represents 81%

Recreational Landings – eRec Data

- eRec captured 707 trips for tautog in 2011
- 14,849 lengths were recorded
- 6,838 fish were harvested
- 8,011 were released (includes legal sized and sub legal)



Recreational Catch – eRec Data by Mode



• Includes discards

ASMFC Addendum 6 to the Fishery Management Plan for Tautog and Coastwide Assessment Update

- Addendum VI approved April 2011
- Sets a new F rebuilding target at $F_{\text{target}}=0.15$
- This requires states to implement measures to achieve a 56% reduction in harvest
- RI and MA were exempt due to the coastwide assessment and stock status that was better relative to coast
- While F rate was below $F_{\text{target}}=0.15$ in RI and MA, stock is still overfished



RI/MA Regional Stock Assessment Update

- States had the opportunity to submit state or region specific assessments for approval by the ASMFC tautog technical committee.
- Regional stock assessment was updated in February 2011

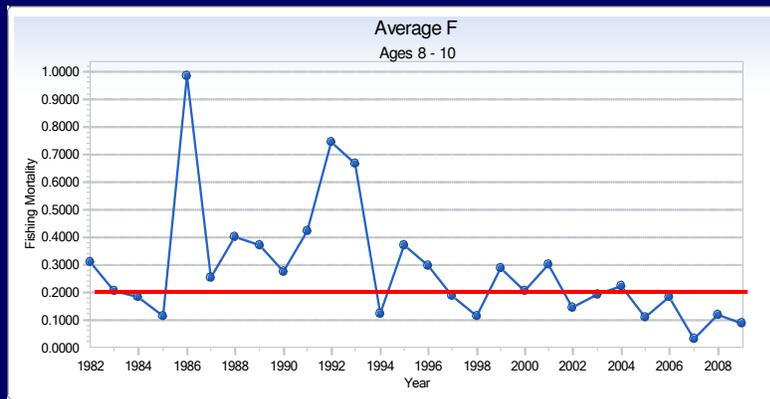


RI/MA Regional Stock Assessment Update

- A combined assessment was conducted using MA + RI data
- Regional F of approximately 0.10 for terminal year 2009, dropping substantially from the F estimate of 0.36 for terminal year 2008
- The retrospective pattern in F is that the terminal year increases in each subsequent year (i.e. F_{2007} was 0.22 and increased to $F_{2007} = 0.24$), however this did not occur in the latest run
- If the pattern does hold, this will result in a higher estimate for 2009
- The regional tautog stock assessment indicates that overfishing is not occurring and that rebuilding is occurring, though slowly.



RI/MA Regional Stock Assessment Update



RI/MA Regional Stock Assessment Update

.SSB grew from 2006 to 2008, but flattened out in 2009, deflating what looked like a positive trend in SSB

.An interesting note is that the years of increasing SSB corresponded to years with $F < 0.15$

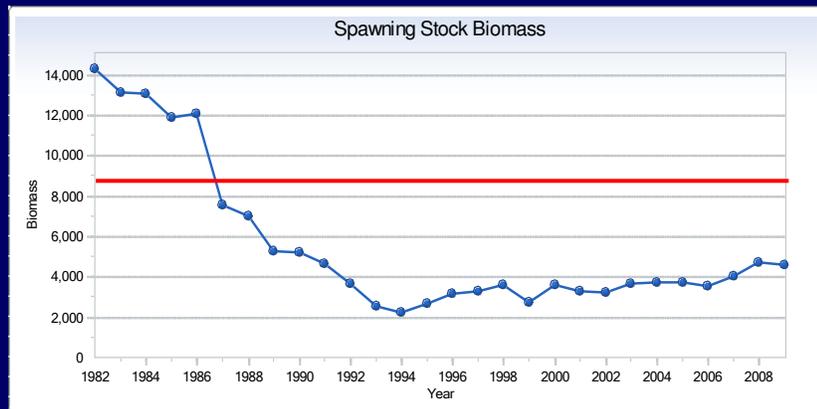
.This element was addressed through Addendum 6 which reset F reference point to 0.15

.RI/MA tautog stock was in an overfished state as of terminal year 2009, and has been since 1986

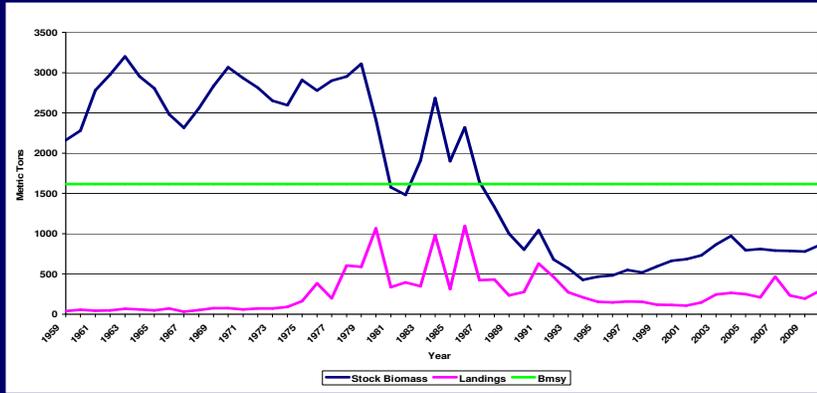
.While stock status seems to have improved relative to last update, due to increased harvest in 2010, it is safe to assume that stock status will most likely decline to some degree when updated



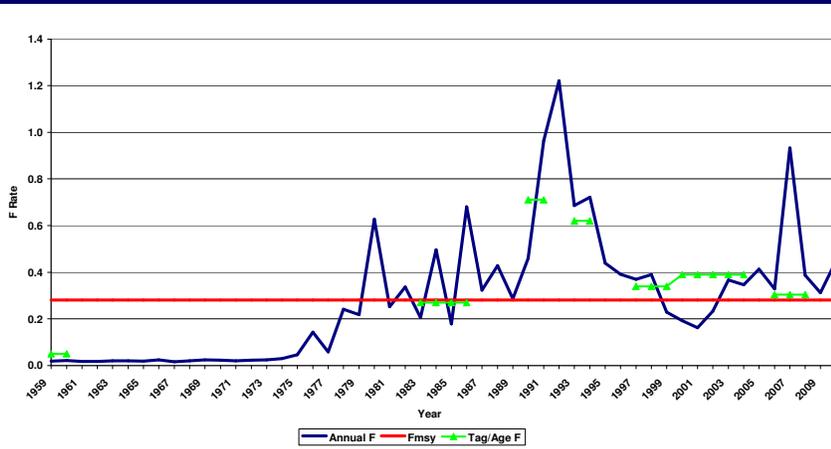
RI/MA Regional Stock Assessment Update



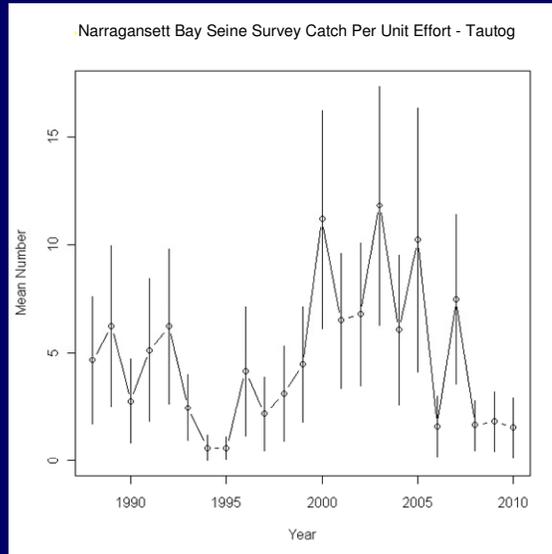
RI/MA Regional Stock Status – Additional Info



RI/MA Regional Stock Status – Additional Info



RI/MA Regional Stock Status – Additional Info



Division of Fish and Wildlife Proposed Changes

- The RI Division of Fish and Wildlife proposes no changes to the recreational fishery in 2012
- The stock still needs to accomplish significant rebuilding
- The extremely low recreational harvest estimates in 2011 are suspicious and need investigation

