

RI Marine Fisheries Council
Tautog Advisory Panel

Meeting Minutes

February 20, 2014 - 4:30 PM URI Bay Campus, Hazard Room

R. Hittinger, Chairman	M Bucko*
P. Heaney	E. Cook ^A
B. Morris*	P. Karcz*
S. Anderson	J. Rainone*
D. Valerien	C. Donilon
G. Latos*	F. Blount ^A
J. Barker	S. Medeiros
R. Tellier	
R. Ballou, RIDEM	J. McNamee, DFW staff

(*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 several 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 2014.

J. McNamee began his presentation with a review of the 2013 commercial fishery. The fishery had a small overage in the spring sub period but the fishery went over the quota for the year by approximately 1,874 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. The fishery did close prior to the end of the period. J. McNamee stated that the DFW was not proposing any changes to the commercial fishery, in particular given that the species was currently undergoing a benchmark stock assessment update which could dramatically impact the stock status and the mechanism by which stock status is determined.

J. McNamee went on to discuss recreational fishery performance in 2013 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 are occurring in the private/rental boat mode. As far as stock status was concerned, there was no new information at this point in time. The reason as noted above was because tautog was going to a benchmark assessment in 2013 - 2014, therefore none of the assessments (regional or coastwide) were run so that the technical committee members could concentrate on the assessment needs. J. McNamee finished by indicating that the DFW was not proposing any changes to the recreational regulations for the 2014 season. He did caution that due to high catch rates in the past few years (with the exception of 2011) he anticipated having to make changes in the coming years.

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 2014. There were no

commercial comments from the panel. J. Barker asked some clarifying questions about data collection and assessment, which J. McNamee answered. R. Hittinger asked for a little more detail on the need to change given the increases in harvest. J. McNamee stated that this was just a sense that he had, but would not know anything conclusively until the assessments were concluded and peer reviewed. At this point they were not even sure which type of assessment would be used.

M. Bucko offered a proposal. **He made a motion to open the fishery earlier than the current April 15 start date, and proposed to open the fishery on April 1.** This would provide benefits to the shore fishery as well as providing an early season opportunity to bait and tackle shops. It also lined harvest up with the current MRIP sampling timeline, which was an additional benefit in his view. The motion was seconded. S. Medieros supported the proposal saying it benefitted the bait shops but would have very little impact to the fishery as catch rates are low this early in the season. There was a discussion about how this would open the recreational fishery before the commercial fishery. J. Rainone stated that if they were going to do this they should have a special season for the party and charter vessels as they were also only a very small proportion of the harvest as well, but a customized season could benefit that industry as well. R. Hittinger took a vote on the motion. **The vote was 4 in favor, 1 opposed.**

The group revisited some of the commercial discussion. **G. Latos stated that they should take the overage out of the summer sub period rather than taking it off the top of the entire quota at the beginning of the year as this was an underutilized sub period. There was a second to the motion.** B. Morris asked to discuss slot limits as well. The group discussed slot limits briefly, with J. McNamee stating that there could be benefits, but the analysis he did indicated that the slot would have to be very small, 1 to 2 inches, to be effective. This was not acceptable to the panel. **R. Hittinger took a vote on the motion, the vote was 4 to approve with 1 abstention.**

J. Rainone suggested that they should increase the bag limit earlier in October. The panel did not take up this proposal.

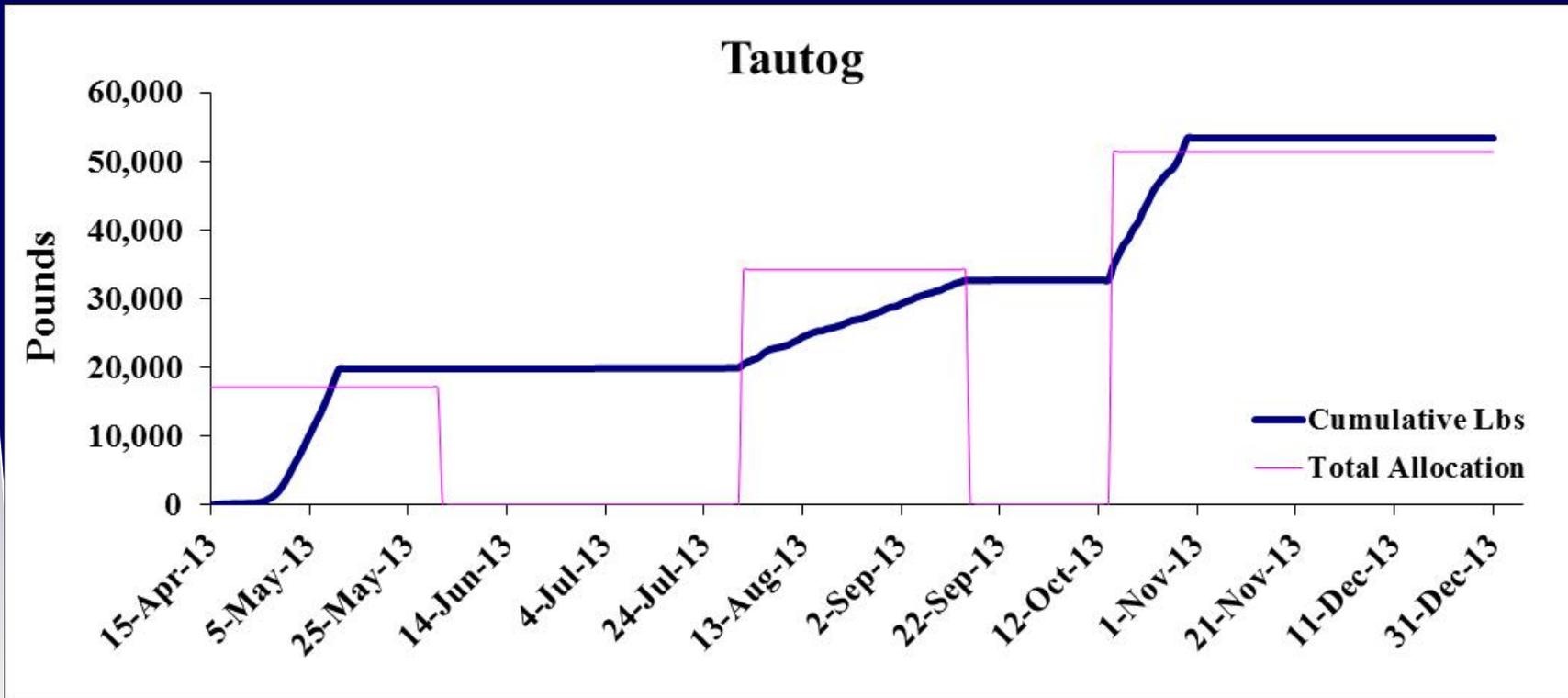
There was one final clarifying question asked. C. Donilon wanted to know why 2011 had such a low harvest amount. He knew the harvest amount was not true and feared that this low harvest amount could impact the state negatively. There was discussion on this question mainly about the foibles of MRIP, but there was no resolution to this question.

R. Hittinger adjourned the meeting at this point.

Summary of the Rhode Island Commercial and Recreational Tautog Fishery



Commercial Landings



- ◆ Overage in Spring of 2,715 lbs
- ◆ Overage of 1,874 lbs for year



Commercial Quota 2014

Period	Period Allocation	Quota Allocation
Year 2014		51,348 lbs – 1,874 lbs overage
Apr 15 – May 31	33.3%	16,491 lbs
Jul 15 – Aug 29	33.3%	16,491 lbs
Oct 15 – Dec 31	33.3%	16,492 lbs



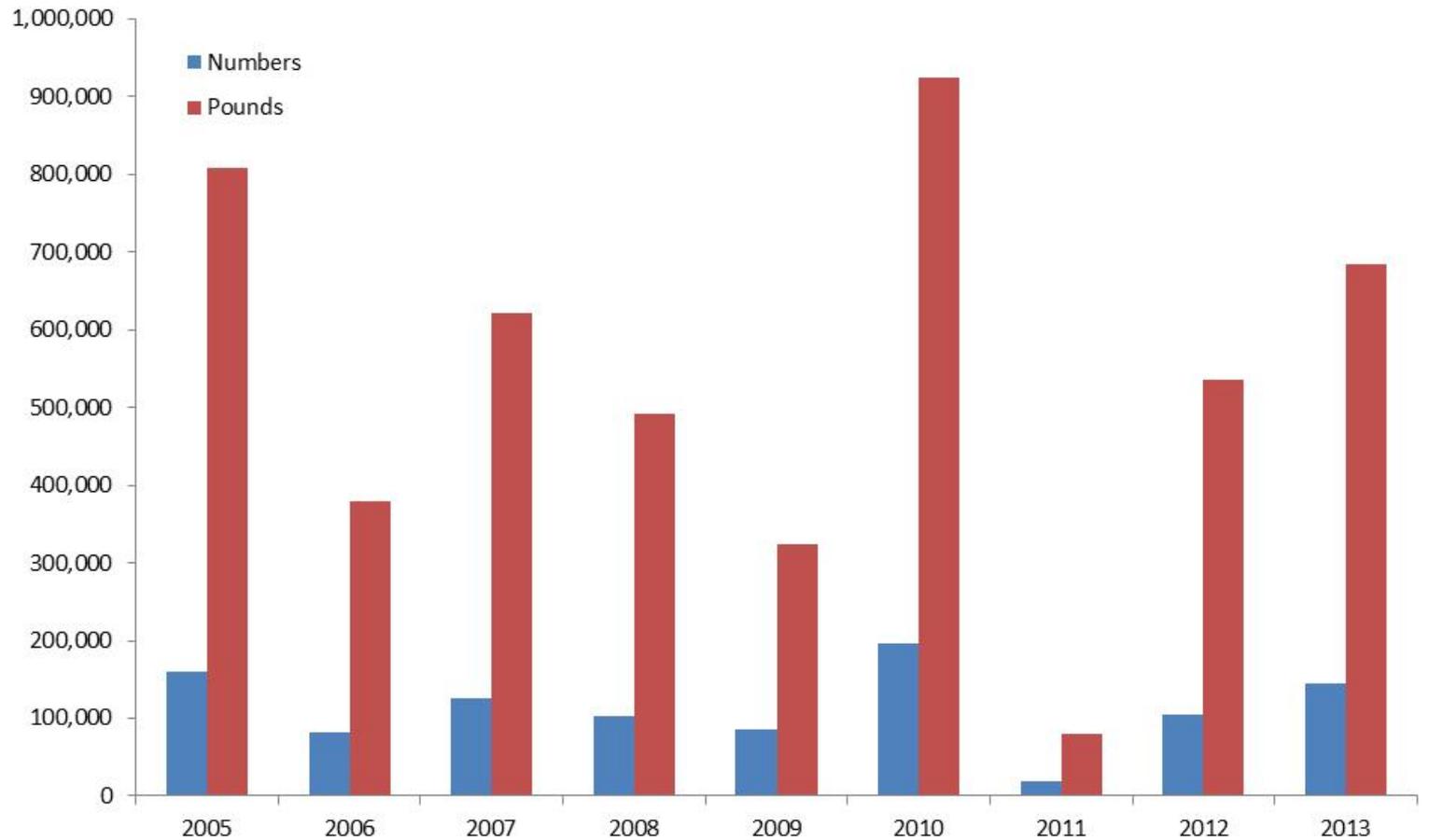
Division of Fish and Wildlife Proposed Changes

- ◆ **The RI Division of Fish and Wildlife proposes no changes to the commercial fishery in 2014**
- ◆ **Commercial landings are constrained by a quota**
- ◆ **Only represents approximately 9% of the total state harvest of tautog**



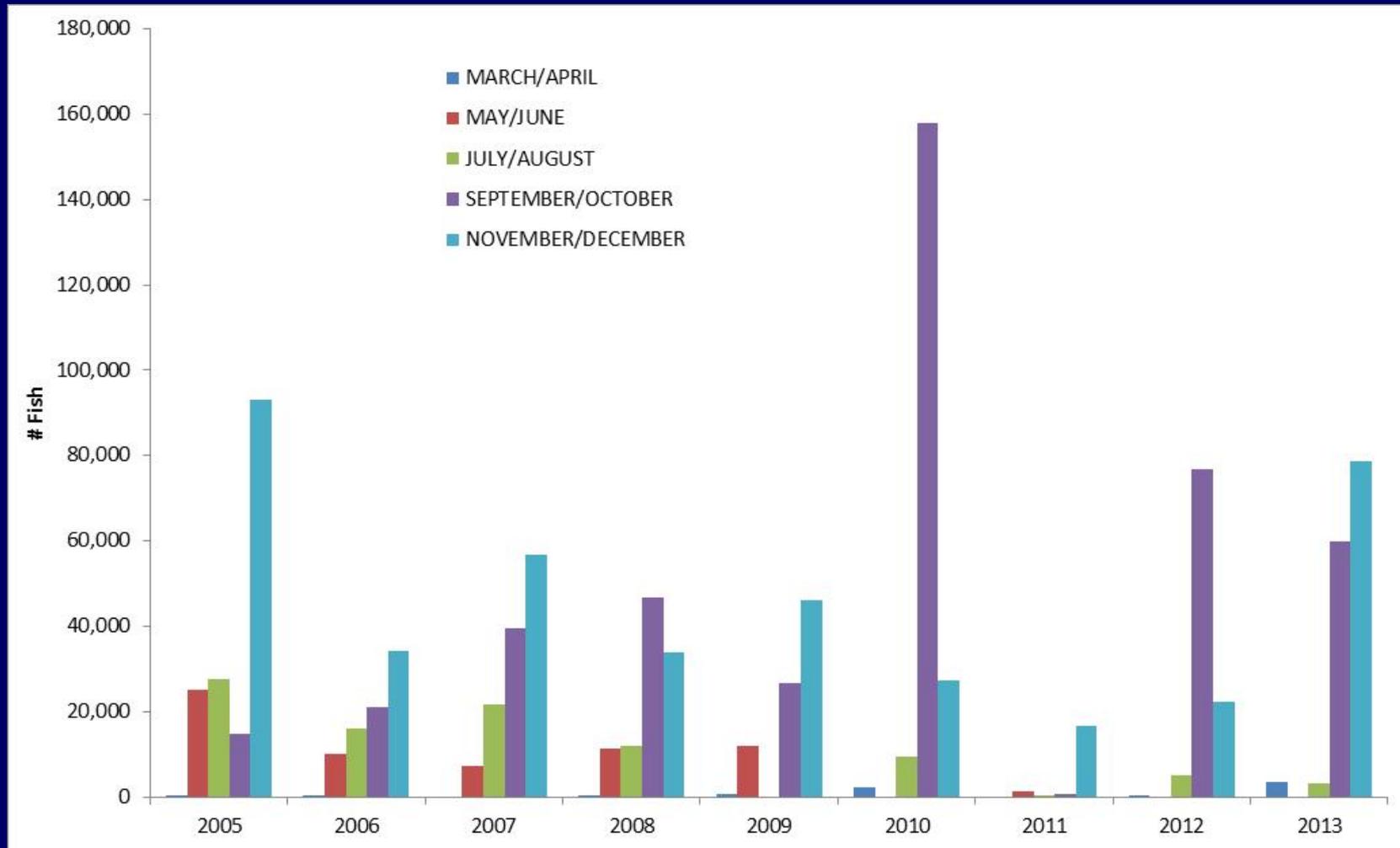
Recreational Harvest - Tautog

***Note: 2013 data preliminary, all waves represented**



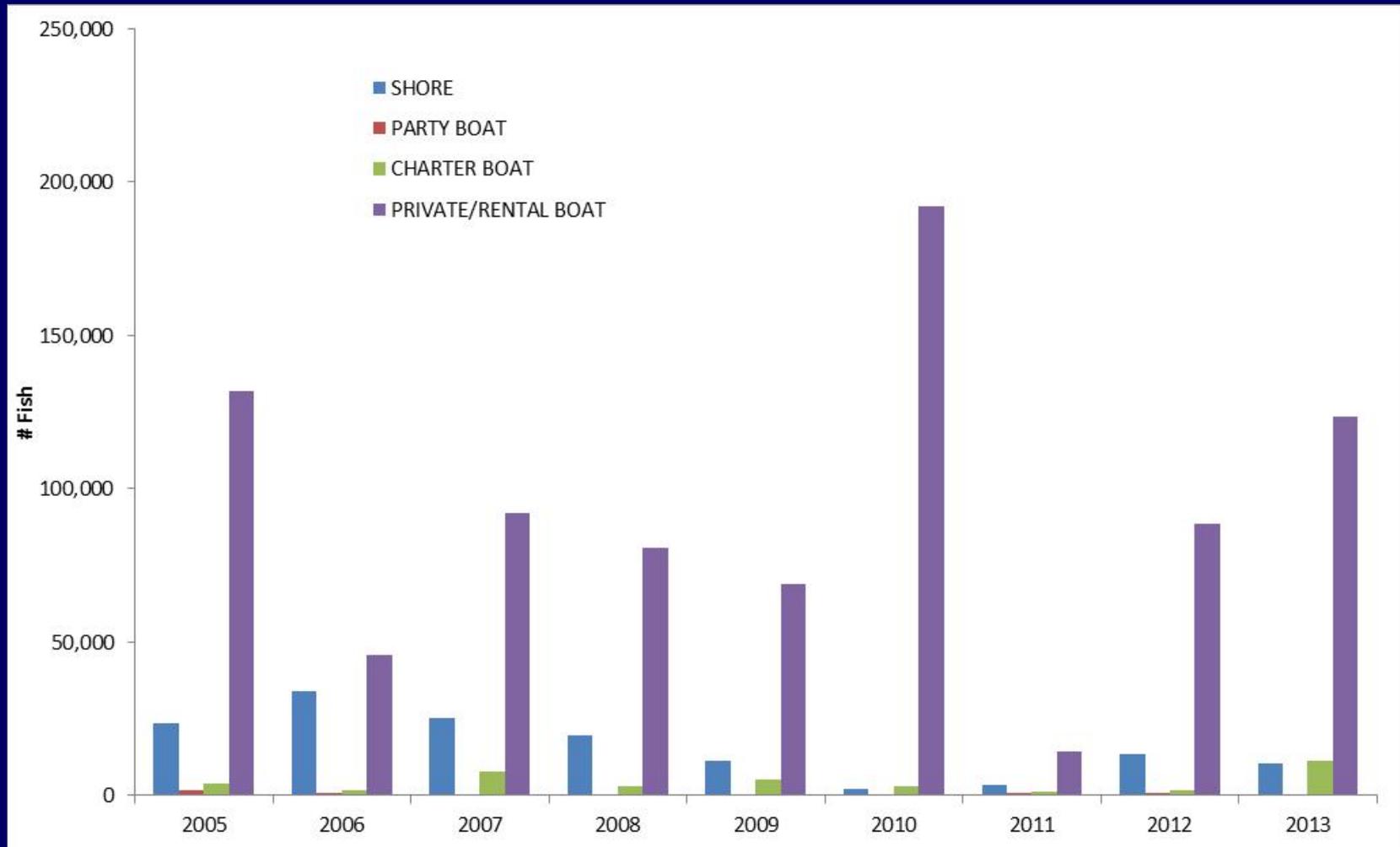
Recreational Harvest By Wave – Tautog

***Note: 2013 data preliminary, all waves represented**



Recreational Harvest By Mode – Tautog

*Note: 2013 data preliminary, all waves represented



Stock Status – Tautog

- ◆ **The tautog stock coastwide: overfished, overfishing occurring according to output of 2011 stock assessment update**
- ◆ **The tautog stock regional: overfished, overfishing not occurring according to output of 2011 regional stock assessment update**
- ◆ **A benchmark assessment is currently underway, therefore no assessment updates were performed in 2013**
- ◆ **Alternative models will be tested in this benchmark**
 - ◆ **Coastwide VPA for continuity**
 - ◆ **Statistical catch at age with regions**
 - ◆ **Data Poor Methods:**
 - ◆ **Depletion Based Stock Reduction Analysis (DBSRA)**
 - ◆ **Depletion Corrected Average Catch (DCAC)**
 - ◆ **Bayesian State Space Surplus Production Model**



2013 Rhode Island Tautog Recreational Measures

- ◆ **All Modes:**
 - ◆ **Minimum size = 16"**
 - ◆ **Season: April 15 – May 31 at 3 fish**
 - ◆ **Season: June 1 – July 31 CLOSED**
 - ◆ **Season: August 1 – October 19 at 3 fish**
 - ◆ **Season: October 20 – December 15 at 6 fish**
 - ◆ **A vessel max of 10 fish in place for all open periods**
 - ◆ **P+C sector does not have a vessel limit but must report to eLogbook**



Division of Fish and Wildlife Proposed Changes

The RI Division of Fish and Wildlife does not recommend any changes at this time given that a new benchmark is underway that is testing some spatially structured models

Future management may be needed given recent high landings rates, but this will not occur until 2015 at the earliest and will be based on the outcome of the assessment



RECOMMENDING CHANGES TO TAUTOG MEETING February 20,2014

I recommend changing the open season from April 15 to April 1, 2014 same bag limits and size limits.

Reasoning:

The recreational tautog spring fishery is most done by shore mode fishermen. The shore mode fishermen are being shut out of the recreational fishing. In the past years the shore tautog harvest have caught a lot less the private boat mode. The loss of winter flounder fishing, regulation size limits on summer flounder have been reducing catch from shore and migration change with schools of mackerel which no longer arriving on the shores of Newport, RI. In a report I wrote in 2010 call "Rhode Island Saltwater Shore Anglers Diminishing Access to Fishery Abundance".

A) Any reduction in harvest of Tautog, Scup, Striped Bass and Blue should have only minimal impact in the shore mode.

B) Find a way to change current regulation from species that shore fishermen have lost access too because of regulatory means.

Moving the date to April 1st is the right thing to do so we can provide shore fishermen more access. The increase in harvest will be negligible. It would provide individual or family to enjoy a nice weekend day in the beginning of April, the ability to go to the beach in hopes of catching supper. This would increase effort but not catch.

**Michael J Bucko
155 Brackett Ave
Tiverton, RI 02878
mj bucko@mindspring.com**