RIMFC Winter Flounder Advisory Panel Minutes

URI Coastal Institute, Hazard Room 4/2/14

Attendees (an * indicates a panel member)

Mike Bucko*
George Allen*
Gerry Carvalho (proxy)
Rich Hittinger (chair proxy)
John Lake (RIDFW)

The meeting started at 6 PM. John Lake gave a presentation on the 2013 winter flounder fishery status, a proposed new recreational season, and a winter flounder project update (attached). Comments were taken on proposed change in the recreational winter flounder season from a 60 day season executed in May and October to on which runs from March 1st to December 31st annually. GA stated that he was in favor of the new season but also stated that it will not make a big difference in landings as the local winter flounder stock is collapsed. MB stated that he was in favor of the new season and it would allow fish to be kept that would otherwise be discarded because in general recreational anglers are not targeting winter flounder and thus not fishing for them during the traditional season. GC stated that he was in favor of expanding the season but said it did not go far enough and that there should be no closed season. After the update on the winter flounder project GA suggested that RIDFW examine the recovery of winter flounder in Boston Harbor to determine what differences there are between here and there.

GC brought up some other business, he wanted to highlight the current unfairness in federal and state management of winter flounder. States are regulating with low possession limits, and closed areas while NOAA fisheries is allowing their vessels expanded possession limits. The allocation of ACL between federal and state vessels should be reexamined and amended to reflect the fact the winter flounder landing used to create the historical allocation were caught in state waters. It is not a level playing field and it seems like the states are protecting the resource so the federal vessels can catch all the fish. JL stated the same fishery specifications exist for 2014 which allot 1210 mt of SNE winter flounder to federal vessels (sector and common pool) and 235 mt to be divided between the states by ASMFC. GC asked for a breakdown of vessels landing winter flounder in 2013. JL stated that SAFIS revealed that 131 vessels landed winter flounder in RI during 2013; 42 had federal multispecies permits, 40 had federal permits without multispecies, 49 were state only vessels (no federal permits). This would make 89 of the 131 vessels subject to the state waters limit. GC stated that the state representatives need to pressure ASMFC to have NOAA Fisheries readdress the current management practices and come up with a new alternative which is more equitable to the states. MB stated that he believes the decline of fish in state waters is a result of them being taken in federal waters and noted that bait and tackle shops have suffered because in the past fishers would start gearing up and fixing up their boats early in the spring to catch winter flounder now that the stock is collapsed people don't start getting ready for

fishing until later in the season and thus spend less money on gear etc. GA stated that he agrees that ASMFC should challenge the federal management practices but not to allow the states to catch more fish but to stop them from allowing federal harvest. The fish need to be preserved by all partners involved or the stock will not recover and slip into further decline. Having no other business the meeting concluded at 7:30 PM.

RIMFC Winter Flounder Advisory Panel

April 2, 2014

Rhode Island Winter Flounder Fishery

- **Stock Status:**

  Southern New England 2011/2010 SARC 52 Assessment:

  SSB_{MSY} = 46,661 mt (16%) F_{MSY} = 0.29 (18%) Overfished/Overfishing not occurring

  RI Local Waters 2011 RIDFW Assessment:

  SSB_{MSY} = 1,024 mt (17%) F_{MSY} = 0.09 (45%) Overfished/Overfishing not occurring

- **Rhode Island Landings**

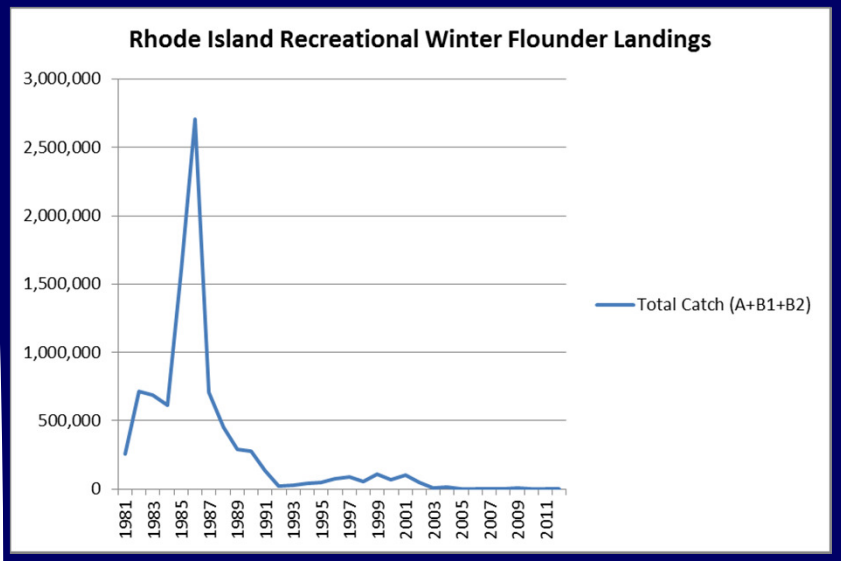
  2013 Commercial = 407,192 LBS

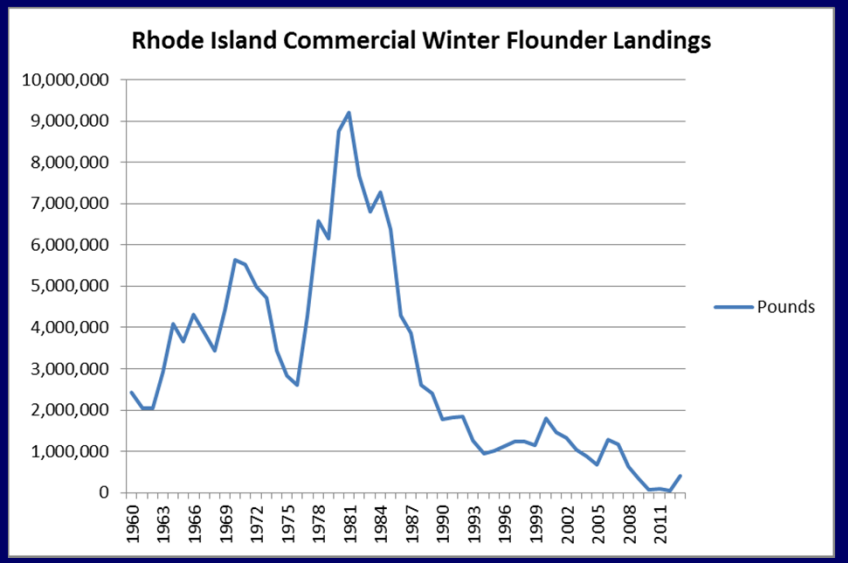
  2012 Recreational = 1,246 Fish

- **2014 Winter Flounder Commercial State Water Specifications**

  Total SNE ACL = 1,612 mt, State water ACL = 235 mt

  RI State waters possession limit = 50 lbs/vsl/day





Proposed Changes to Winter Flounder Recreational Season

RIDFW proposes to change the annual recreational season from:

30 days after the fourth Saturday in April
30 days after the last Saturday in September

To:

March 1 – December 31

Bag limit and size limit remain the same (2 fish /person/day, 12 inches)

Proposed Language:

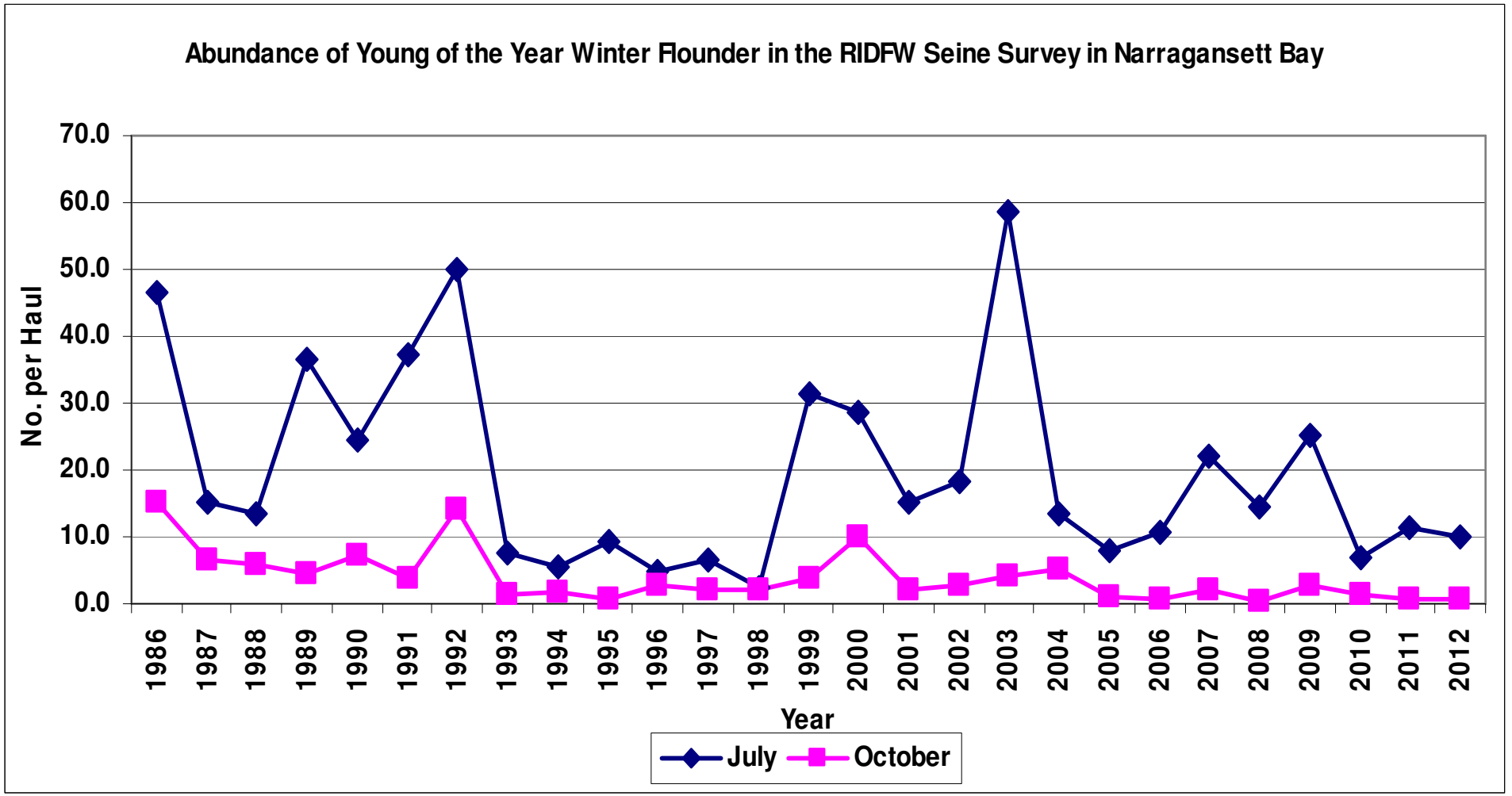
7.8.1-2 Recreational Seasons, Possession Limits, and Closed Areas:
~~(a) Beginning on the fourth Saturday in April and continuing for 30 days, and beginning on the last Saturday in September and continuing for 30 days~~, Between March 1 and December 31 of each year, fishermen may take and possess not more than two (2) winter flounder per person per calendar day in Rhode Island waters, except in Narragansett Bay north of the Colregs line, and in Potter Pond,Point Judith Pond and the Harbor of Refuge, where the harvest or possession of winter flounder is prohibited.

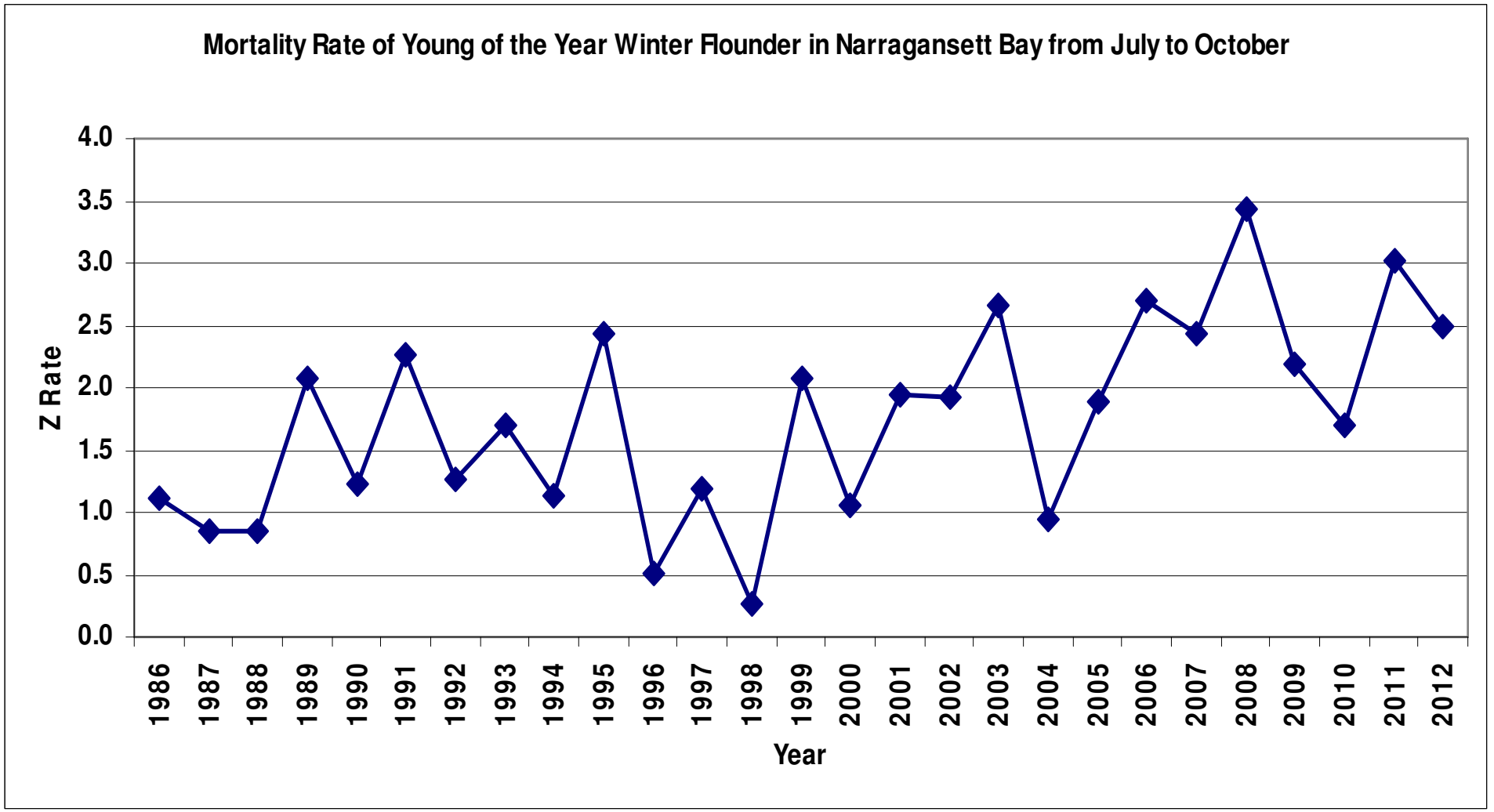
Winter Flounder Project Update

- RIDFW is looking at life stage bottle necks for winter flounder
- Will be presented to RIMFC at a summer meeting.
- Preliminary analysis:
  - High mortality between larval stage and adult
  - YOY mortality rate between July and October increased in recent years
  - Overwinter mortality has increased on age 1+ 2+ fish
  - Predation mortality is correlated with increase of Summer Flounder juveniles
  - Adult age 4+ fish have been level in recent trawl survey data
  - Could indicate change in spawning behavior
- Next steps :
  - Identify local spawning areas that contribute to adult population
  - Link adults to juveniles using genetic signatures
  - Partner with University of Rhode Island using new Marine Fisheries Institute partnership

Winter Flounder Life Stage Analysis

- Break life history up into important stages, such as larvae, young of the year, juveniles, adults.
- Compute abundance indices for stages from RIDFW survey data.
- Calculate relative mortality rates between life stages as:
- $Z = -\ln(N_{i+1}/N_i)$.
- Test for trends in Z particularly increases that might indicate mortality bottlenecks.


Abundance of Young of the Year Winter Flounder in the RIDFW Seine Survey in Narragansett Bay
No. per Haul
70.0
60.0
50.0
40.0
30.0
20.0
10.0
0.0
1986
1987
1988
1989
1990
1991
1992
1993
1994
1995
1996
1997
1998
1999
2000
2001
2002
2003
2004
2005
2006
2007
2008
2009
2010
2011
2012
Year
July
October


Mortality Rate of Young of the Year Winter Flounder in Narragansett Bay from July to October
Z Rate
4.0
3.5
3.0
2.5
2.0
1.5
1.0
0.5
0.0
1986
1987
1988
1989
1990
1991
1992
1993
1994
1995
1996
1997
1998
1999
2000
2001
2002
2003
2004
2005
2006
2007
2008
2009
2010
2011
2012
Year

Results and Next Steps

- Break point in 2006
- Z_1= 1.47, corresponds to a July to October survival rate of 23%
- Z_2= 2.57, corresponds to a July to October survival rate of 8%.
- Can repeat exercise for other life stages, build simulation model, and do population viability analysis.