

**RI Marine Fisheries Council  
Tautog Advisory Panel  
Meeting Minutes  
July 22, 2010 - 6:00 PM  
URI Bay Campus, Corless Auditorium**

R. Hittinger, Chair

F. Blount<sup>A</sup>

M. Bucko\*

G. Oakley\*

E. Cook \*

M. Ambrosia

S. Parente – Council member

G. Allen

R. Bellavance – Council member

Jason McNamee, RIDFW

(\*primary advisory panel member; <sup>A</sup> alternate member)

R. Hittinger was running a bit late so J. McNamee of the RI Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) began the meeting with the hope that R. Hittinger would be amenable to this course of action when he arrived. J. McNamee had a presentation (see attached) which covered the first 5 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 2010 - 2011.

J. McNamee began his presentation with a review of the 2010 commercial fishery to date. The fishery had a minor overage in the spring sub period and was the smallest overage seen in recent history. He stated that dealer reporting seemed to be improving, certainly in the tautog fishery. The summer sub period catch rates were relatively high at this point. He stated that if this trend continued the summer would close prematurely. He concluded with a slide showing that the commercial fishery only represents about 10% of the total state tautog harvest. J. McNamee stated that the DFW was not proposing any changes to the commercial fishery. J. Carvalho stated that the number of non residents who were taking tautog out of RI waters was disproportionate to the biomass available for harvest by the residents of the state. He felt it was an inequity that people who depend on commercial fishing to provide them access to the fish are unable to purchase a locally caught tautog for the majority of the year. He felt it was mismanagement of the resource to allow non residents access to the tautog resource to the disadvantage of RI residents, who can not purchase a tautog for roughly 99% of the year.

J. McNamee went on to discuss recreational fishery performance in 2009 and 2010. He started by indicating that the data was incomplete for 2010, only wave 2 was available at this point. However, he felt it was worth reviewing the changes in the recreational fishery even at this early date. What he indicated was that in 2004 and 2007 there were anomalously high harvest numbers that had detrimental impacts to local stock status. Harvest in 2008 and 2009, conversely, went down. Despite the decrease in harvest and increases in the fishery independent indices, stock status in the RI and MA region has declined in the last two years. 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 the same deteriorating trend. He also noted that landings in the early spring season were increasing (wave 2). J. McNamee went on to give 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 (72%) are occurring in the private/rental boat mode.

J. McNamee finished by indicating that the DFW, despite indicating no changes for the 2010 recreational fishery in December of 2009, was proposing a bag limit drop in the fall fishery to protect against large harvest spikes in the end of wave 5 and wave 6. The DFW felt compelled to make this change mid year due to the marked decline in stock status. In conclusion J. McNamee stated that the stock will be reassessed on both the regional and coastwide level in 2011, at which time some new modeling techniques will be attempted.

R. Hittinger asked if there were any alternate proposals from the meeting participants to change tautog management in the recreational fishery in 2010. There was a brief discussion about the regional approach, with one option being that the panel could recommend that they did not want to remain in the regional assessment. The panel did not feel this was appropriate and felt that the regional assessment makes more sense from a biological perspective as this stock did not migrate far from state waters.

F. Blount began the discussion. He voiced concern about the increase in wave 2. He felt that even though in magnitude the wave 2 landings were not high, the 2010 data represented a 12 fold increase in landings in that period. He felt we should be cautious with that period as it could potentially impact the stock negatively in the future. He also voiced his doubts that the decreased bag limit would constrain landings and noted that wave 5, which has a 3 fish bag for the majority of the wave, in most years had similar harvest rates to wave 6. There was a discussion on why only the bag limit was chosen to be changed. J. McNamee stated that the DFW felt changing the bag limit would create less impact than, for instance, closing a season, as fishermen could still fish albeit at a lower bag limit. F. Blount concluded by stating that a dramatically reduced bag limit would severely impact the party and charter industry. There was a discussion on the proportion of harvest that occurred in waves 5 and 6. As noted in the report put together by the DFW, this equates to roughly 60% of the annual catch.

M. Bucko made a proposal. He started by stating that RI didn't need to only constrain harvest but it also needed to constrain effort. He stated that not only would a decreased bag limit impact harvest, but it could also impact effort. M. Bucko had done an analysis and had come up with a 5 fish bag limit as a restriction that would have this dual effect. He went on to state that this could be combined with a vessel limit, as had been done in the MA scup fishery. J. McNamee stated that there was not a precedent for a vessel based limit in the RI recreational fishery and did not know how it would be received. As well he stated that he thought DEM Enforcement might have objections due to the increased complexity in that they might feel these multiple limits (both per person and per vessel) could lead to confusion with fishermen. He concluded by mentioning that the shore based segment of the fishery, approximately 25% of harvest, would be unaffected by this

constraint. Despite these possibilities, J. McNamee thought they could at least bring the proposal forward to see how the public would react to the idea. R. Hittinger asked if a reduction amount could be calculated for this strategy. J. McNamee stated that it would be possible, though difficult because it would need to be calculated based on raw MRFSS intercept data, which would have to be drilled down to the vessel level. R. Hittinger asked whether the 5 fish per person would meet reduction measures. J. McNamee stated that there were no specific reduction metrics that had to met at this point due to the regional approach, RI was being proactive at this point. F. Blount supported J. McNamee's comments and stated that regardless of what they did (other than nothing), it would be more restrictive.

G. Allen asked what MA was intending to do. J. McNamee stated that MA did not have any plans to restrict at this point because they were already at 3 fish per person all season long and had a quota constraint on their commercial fishery. He went on to state that RI tautog landings were currently much higher than MA.

R. Bellavance stated that he had recently attended a tourism symposium and one of the discussions was about how state agencies work against each other and industry when promoting tourism. He felt this was an example of that. He had submitted a proposal on behalf of the Party and Charter Boat Association (see attached). The point of the proposal was that the party and charter industry accounted for only 4% of the tautog harvest in the state, yet the state received disproportionate benefit from that 4% because out of state tourists came in to RI, bought hotel rooms and ate in RI restaurants, and one of the draws in to RI was patronage of the party and charter boats. The marketing of the high fall bag limit was very important to their industry to draw customers in from out of state. R. Bellavance concluded by stating that the party and charter harvest was not biologically as significant as other modes in the tautog fishery yet had a large economic benefit to the state. He also stated that the party and charter participants, at least as far as his association was concerned, would be willing to participate in any permit or logbook requirements to allow them to maintain a higher bag limit. Programs had been developed like this in the past, specifically for tautog. There was a discussion about the precision requirements of the tautog fishery management plan. J. McNamee stated that they currently did not meet that standard (a PSE of 20 or less); however the idea of a logbook requirement could be used to supplement MRFSS estimates and increase precision.

There was a brief discussion about the equity arguments involved with mode splitting in the recreational fishery. R. Bellavance stated that the party and charter mode had taken some reductions in bag limits in their proposal; therefore they were bearing some of the burden of the restrictions.

There was a further discussion on what would happen if RI chose to not take action in this year. J. McNamee stated that he did not know, but ventured that the Board could revoke the regional approach and require that RI take the full reduction taken by the other states back in 2008.

F. Blount asked what the process would be for next year's management, would it simply default to the current management program. J. McNamee stated that his intent was to meet in the late winter of 2011 and revisit the issue with the most up to date information. F. Blount voiced his concerns with the other waves in the fishery. He stated that he has seen growth in the other waves and he thought it would be an error to focus all of the restrictions solely in the fall fishery. He voiced support for the two proposals that came forward but reiterated his opposition to the April 15<sup>th</sup> opening; he felt it should have remained as a May 1 start date because he sees trouble looming in the early spring fishery which had increased twelve fold since implementation. F. Blount noted that he had some concerns about "port hopping" by party and charter vessels from other states. In other words keeping the high bag limits for the party and charter industry could increase effort by drawing out of state party and charter vessels in to RI.

R. Hittinger asked if there were further proposals to come forward. There were no further proposals. There was an effort to try and draw consensus between the two existing proposals. After the discussion no consensus was reached, therefore they remained two separate proposals with the modification/clarification to M. Bucko's proposal to extend the vessel limit to the entire open season (Note: M. Bucko withdrew his proposal following the meeting).

G. Allen stated that he supported not impacting the early spring fishery; however he voiced support for the vessel limit as he felt this was a good way to constrain landings in the fall fishery, which he viewed as the period of time that was negatively impacting the fishery. He thought the vessel limit should only be in effect in the fall. He concluded by stating that he thought buy-in by the recreational fishery as a whole could be achieved if the case was clearly stated that the party and charter industry represented a very small segment of harvest and that this small segment was being held to higher reporting standards. G. Oakley stated that he felt the party and charter industry should take a bag limit decrease as well, albeit perhaps not as dramatic as being proposed for the other modes as a signal of good faith. R. Bellavance stated that party and charter harvest was stable over the past 10 years and had not increased; therefore he felt the tautog fishery issue was not a party and charter issue. He voiced concern over a bag limit drop because he did not know the bag limit number at which the RI party and charter industry loses its competitive advantage over other states.

R. Hittinger adjourned the meeting.