



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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Striped Bass Advisory Panel Meeting Summary

Conference Call
April 21, 2016

Advisory Panel Members: Louis Bassano (Chair, NJ), Arnold Leo (NY), David Sikorski (MD), John Pedrick (PA), John McMurray (NY), William Hall, Jr. (VA), Kelly Place (VA), Pete Whelan (NH), Edwin Cook (RI), Ed O'Brien (MD)

ASMFC Staff: Max Appelman, Deke Tompkins

The Striped Bass Advisory Panel (AP) met via conference call to receive an update from staff on two striped bass management issues that are currently not being discussed at the Management Board-level: 1) the EEZ Transit Zone Clarification and Access Act (H.R. 3070), and 2) the western North Atlantic squid resource. Also, the AP elected a Chairman and Vice-chairman.

"EEZ Transit Zone Clarification and Access Act" (H.R. 3070)

Although the current draft of the bill does not convert the Block Island Sound Transit Zone to state waters or permit striped bass fishing within the zone, nor does it change the current process to permit striped bass fishing in any part of the EEZ in the future, the consensus of the AP is that the passing of H.R. 3070 would set unfavorable precedence for the use of legislative procedures to override the current fishery management and conservation framework. AP members noted that, regardless of the final language, this is not the proper avenue for addressing issues related to prohibited fishing for striped bass in uniquely located federal waters. The AP is in support of fishery management processes that are scientifically sound, are based on technical expertise, and provide ample opportunity for public participation. Additionally, in light of a declining spawning stock, AP members expressed concern regarding insufficient data to support the implementation of a recreational striped bass fishery in currently prohibited waters. It was noted that considerable action was taken prior to the 2015 fishing season in order to reduce fishing mortality back to target levels, and stabilize (or reverse) the downward trend in spawning stock biomass. Management has not yet had the opportunity to respond to the performance of those measures, thus it is the consensus of the AP that the precedence of this bill is not only unwarranted, but is also ill-timed.

Western North Atlantic Squid Resource

Longfin squid (squid) fishing and harvest have increased recently in Nantucket Sound and the surrounding areas. Squid are a well-known food source for striped bass, and the Nantucket Sound uniquely supports large concentrations of both prey and predator during the summer

months. Some AP members (and other fishermen) in the region have reported a decline of migratory striped bass during that time. It is believed that the above average harvest of squid may be a contributing factor to the decreased availability of striped bass during summer/fall fishing seasons. The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) is currently drafting a Squid Capacity Amendment which considers options for a squid buffer zone beyond state waters in the area south of Nantucket, as well as addressing the potential for increased effort in the squid fishery. Staff will track the progress of the amendment and provide updates to the AP as necessary. Since squid are of great importance to the striped bass resource, the AP noted that it would appreciate the opportunity to submit comment on the draft amendment, collectively, in support of a squid buffer zone surrounding Nantucket Sound.

Elect Chair and Vice Chair

The AP elected Captain Louis Bassano to the position of AP Chair, and Kelly Place to the position of AP Vice-Chair.

Other Business

The AP would like to meet more frequently and become more proactive regarding conservation and management of Atlantic striped bass. The AP Chair and staff, in consultation with the Board Chair, will discuss the AP's options moving forward.



Chesapeake Bay Ecological Foundation, Inc.
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MENHADEN CRUCIAL TO STRIPED BASS HEALTH IN CHESAPEAKE BAY **Striped Bass & Menhaden Management Disrupts Chesapeake Bay Ecosystem**

Chesapeake Bay Ecological Foundation (CBEF) conducted the only long-term (2005-2015), year-round nutritional and food habit study on adult striped bass, examining over 15,000 fish and major prey consumed – primarily Atlantic menhaden. Study areas included Choptank River, Chesapeake Bay & Atlantic Coast from Montauk, NY to Oregon Inlet, NC.

Chesapeake Bay is the largest nursery and production area for striped bass and menhaden. In the Bay, menhaden are crucial prey for striped bass over 12" and essential to the ecosystem as filter feeders and key prey for many predatory fish and birds. In 1990, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) reopened the Maryland striped bass fishery after being closed during a five year moratorium. At the same time, ASMFC raised the striped bass minimum size from 14" to 18" in MD's portion of the Bay, increasing prey demand on the depressed menhaden population. In 1991, concern that the Atlantic menhaden stock was being overfished appeared in a National Marine Fisheries Service publication "Marine Fisheries Review" ("Assessment and Management of Atlantic & Gulf Menhaden Stocks", D.S. Vaughan & J.V. Merriner). The summary cautioned: *"The expansion of fishing on the spawning stock in New England waters concurrently with increasing fishing pressure on pre-spawning menhaden off Virginia and North Carolina in the fall prompts concern for maintenance of the Atlantic menhaden resource"*. By the time the Bay's striped bass population reached ASMFC's abundance objective in the late 1990s, a high percentage were malnourished and diseased. Recent striped bass tagging studies indicate high natural mortality rates.

Striped bass management must utilize multi-species approaches. Prey shortages in the Bay are not factored in ASMFC management of striped bass. Poor health and survival from the predator/prey imbalance may be undercutting striped bass management goals. ASMFC has failed to protect small, young menhaden, crucial prey for non-migratory adult Chesapeake Bay striped bass. Management of the menhaden harvest should be based on quotas and size limits that protect the Chesapeake Bay's striped bass prey supply, rather than the size of the estimated menhaden spawning stock, which is uncorrelated to recruitment.

CBEF's research enhances knowledge of Chesapeake Bay & mid-Atlantic ecosystems and the life cycle of striped bass & menhaden. Our study determined that lowering the striped bass size limit and/or establishing a menhaden minimum size for the purse seine fishery is essential for maintenance of healthy Chesapeake Bay adult striped bass.