Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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Tautog Advisory Panel
October 5, 2015
9 Total Attendees

Meeting Staff (2): Ashton Harp (ASMFC), Katie Drew (ASMFC)

Meeting Participants (7): John Mihale (NY), Jack Conway (CT), Denise Wagner (NJ), Jim Dawson (VA), Wes Blow (VA), Travis Barao (RI), Edward Yates (NJ)

Issue 1: Regional Management

The AP could not come to a consensus for a regional management breakdown. However all could agree that they did not want any option that resulted in severe cuts. Specific comments:

- **Option 3 or 4: Jim Dawson (VA) Wes Blow (VA), Travis Barao (RI)** are strongly in favor of regional management, they believe status quo will mean more restrictions.
- **Option 1 (status quo): John Mihale (NY)** is not completely against regionalization he just thinks the fishery needs more time (until 2017-2018) to adjust to the Addendum VI management measures that became effective in 2012. Because the fish protected under these regulations are just entering the reproductive phase of their lives.
- **No Decision: Denise Wagner (NJ)** doesn't want to commit to any option now, she wants to see the numbers for Option 4. Although she is hesitant to be lumped into a region with New York because southern New Jersey and New York have different bathymetry and fish.
- **No Decision: Edward Yates (NJ)** is concerned regionalization will look similar to the regional quota system that is being used for black sea bass. Although it was explained that the regional management being put forth from tautog is different that the regional quota system for black sea bass.

Issue 2: FMP Goals and Objectives

No comment

Issue 3: Management Measures

General consensus, for those in favor of regional management, that states should have the flexibility to manage their own fishery within a regional management area (i.e. state by state conservation equivalency). Additional issues that had a general consensus:

- A uniform size limit for the coast (or across regional management areas) should not be implemented
- A uniform possession limit cap for the coast (or across regional management areas) should not be implemented. All possession limits for the recreational fishery should be per person, not per boat.

Regulatory suggestions:

- Spawning regulations should match the spawning timeframes, for example the spawning timeframes are changing in certain regions due to climate induced water temperature changes and the regulations should be updated as appropriate.
- States should prohibit the use of roller rig gear
- Incorporate water temperature into stock assessments

Issue 4: Reference Points and Rebuilding Timeframes

For those in favor of regional management, there was a general consensus that regional reference points and regional rebuilding timeframes are appropriate.

Issue 5: Other Issues

Unlicensed, recreational fishermen are taking **undersized tautog for the live market**; this includes people in row boats at night (who understand, but do not follow the regulations in place) and those fishing on jettis and bridges (who don't understand the regulations). The black market is in direct competition with commercial fishermen; and as the value of the fish continues to increase illegal fishing will only rise in the future.

The AP believes a two-prong approach is necessary to combat the black market:

1. Fines/penalties need to be higher/stricter, which should include fines >$1,000 and jail time (taking away gear or licenses is not strict enough)
2. Law enforcement needs to visit restaurants and fish markets to monitor fish length, in addition to being more widely seen on docks, jettis and on the water.

Additional solutions: (Note: the AP did not collectively agree on every suggestion below)

- The fishery should have state and federal regulations
- There should be a federal permit to fish for tautog
- There is a Pennsylvania loop hole; Pennsylvania fishermen are fishing on the Delaware River and selling live tautog to the Philadelphia market. Pennsylvania should be added to the tautog management unit.
- Regulatory signs should be in multiple languages including Chinese, Spanish and English

The AP is concerned that the recreational fishery as a whole harvests a lot of tautog for **recreational bait** (e.g. ~ 10-12 tautog per person).

AP commercial fishermen are against a **commercial tagging program**, they believe the two-prong approach (above) has a higher degree of success than a commercial tagging program. Concerns include tampering with the tag at the restaurant, for example a tag could be removed from a legal sized fish and placed on an undersized fillet. They also believe more research is needed on this topic, however even if a tag can be placed on a fish without killing it in the long run they still believe a tagging program is too costly and places an unnecessary burden on commercial fishermen.

Denise Wagner (NJ) is not in favor of additional **artificial reefs** because New Jersey commercial fishermen are not allowed to fish on them; additional artificial reefs equates to less fishing ground for commercial fishermen in New Jersey.

Jim Dawson (VA) wants **improved recreational data** in the tautog fishery, he suggests a pilot program where all tautog recreational fishermen have to submit a landing report, similar to a VTR.