



# Cod is King of Winter

by Capt. Dave Monti

In Rhode Island cod is the saltwater king of winter. Winter cod fishing generally starts mid-December and ends in February. The minimum size for cod in Rhode Island is 22" with a catch limit of 10 fish/person/day.

Capt. Rick Bellavance, president of the Rhode Island Party & Charter Boat Association (RIPCBA), said, "The winter cod fishery in Rhode Island can be amazing. The cod will school in shoal water south of Block Island and offer an awesome opportunity to get out on the water during the winter months."

Few private boats are still in the water after Thanksgiving, but in Rhode Island three party boats and a handful of charter boat fish throughout the winter for cod. In recent years I have fished in the winter on some of these boats with good success.

## The cod fishery

When my father was a young man, Rhode Islanders caught cod from shore. An angler could catch as many as ten fish to sixty pounds from shore in one outing. Fishing from shore for cod is no longer possible. There are few cod close to shore as they have received so much commercial fishing pressure over the years that they are no longer plentiful.

Cod are a cold water fish and with climate change and warming water along the northeast continental shelf some scientist believe that cod are headed for deeper cooler water. However, Capt. Frank Blount of the Frances Fleet believes southern New England cod are not following normal climate change patterns.

"The fishing is getting better with anglers catching cod closer to shore now when fishing for tautog in the fall. I am not a scientist, but believe there are three distinct cod stocks and the southern New England stock is doing well, the Gulf of Maine stock is slowly improving and the George's Bank stock is not in very good shape," said Blount.

Capt. Peter Bacon of Big Game Sport Fishing Charters said, "Since recreational fishing closed in the Gulf of

Maine, the fish off Rhode Island seem to have been getting larger. We always caught nice market cod, but not the 35 pound fish we have been catching recently."

Capt. Chris Cullen, owner of the *Island Current III* party boat said, "Overall fishing last season was very good. We had epic years in 2010 and 2011 right around Block Island. It works



**RISAA Member, Capt. Wade Baker of Booked Off Charters with a pair of 25 lb. cod jigged up last January**

the same way now as it always did - if you find the bait (herring and mackerel) you find the fish."

"In the past two years fishing has been better. We fish south of Bock Island as well as at Cox Ledge. In the winter we often get a pile of fish and when they are here the fishing is good, and then it may shut off. The fish may move after a storm then it is a matter of finding where they are again." said Capt. Andy Dangelo who runs the *Seven B's* party boat in winter months when it fishes for cod.

Capt. Tony Guarino of the charter boat *Booked Off* said, "Over the past five years the fishing is getting better, good winter and summer fishing, we do about 130 trips a year and 60 to 70 of them are cod trips, both winter and summer trips."



**RISAA Member, Capt. Shamus Mara of Big Game Sportfishing**

## Where to find cod

Cod are bottom fish that are basically lazy. They are not aggressively hunting, they pretty much stay on the bottom, often near structure (underwater wrecks, rock piles, holes, humps and drop offs), waiting for prey (cod like to feed on maceral and herring) to come by. So you have to go to where the cod are to catch them. They are not likely going to come to you.



**Mike Kwok of Palisades Park, NJ with the 15 pound cod and 4 pound black sea bass he caught last year on the *Frances Fleet*.**

different species so we find them pretty regularly right around Block Island in December and January. We like to fish an open bottom near structure. One of the biggest problems are dogfish." (to page 40)

Capt. Rusty Benn of the *Seven B's* party boat said, "Winter cod fishing has been pretty good. The cod have been left alone most of the season up as anglers are targeting