



# The Watch

Doug MacPherson, Legislative Chairman



## Lobbying for Flexibility in Fisheries

While we awaited the rush to closure of the General Assembly in Rhode Island I was off to Washington, DC to represent RISAA in a national lobbying effort, in partnership with Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA) in support of HR 5425.

Together with RFA members representing Atlantic and Gulf coast states we visited both Senate and House member's offices explaining and soliciting support for this much needed bill. It was a long afternoon of walking from office to office, but in the end, I felt it was time well spent.



I would like to extend my personal thanks for the time spent with us by our own Senator Sheldon Whitehouse's Legislative Assistant, **Brad Crowell**, in hearing out my personal appeal on behalf of RISAA and its members.

The bill, entitled "Flexibility in Rebuilding American Fisheries Act of 2008," is intended to inject flexibility into the management process by updating the existing exceptions.

It does not change the current ten year rebuilding requirements. What it would do is to allow flexibility for over-fishing now required to end in two years as a result of the re-authorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Act in 2007.

The bill would allow, in limited circumstances, the addition of a few years to the 10 year period in order to allow a more gradual path to rebuilding fisheries. The flexibility provisions under this bill could only be triggered if the fish stock is on **positive rebuilding trend**. The authority is discretionary so that the Department of Commerce would be required to evaluate fisheries that may be eligible for such relief.

### WHY THIS BILL?

The impetus for this bill is the current situation we have arrived at with Summer Flounder, or as most of us call it Fluke. Since the original management plan in 1998, fishing mortality on fluke has been reduced 80% with a total harvest decrease of 96%. In addition, both total stock biomass (total number of fish) and spawning stock biomass has increased 251% and 280% respectively. Too put this perspective, this level of rebuilding is comparable to the striped bass fishery and which is touted by fisheries management as a fully recovered stock.

Despite these impressive gains, in 2008 we saw the total allowed catch for fluke reduced to its lowest level in history with

the National Marine Fisheries Service threatening to close the entire fishery in Federal Waters in 2009. NMFS has taken these steps because the current law, with its ten year rebuilding requirement, does not allow for any flexibility or any recognition of the tremendous improvements in the health of this and other fish stocks.

Sounds a little crazy, but these are the facts. It is likely that this scenario will apply to other species as well, as we come up the end of their 10 year rebuilding periods and measures such as this put in place for them as well.

### RHODE ISLAND REPS IN WASHINGTON

It appears that in our own Congressional Delegation, **Senator Sheldon Whitehouse** and **Representative Patrick Kennedy** are in **support** this bill.

Senator Jack Reed and Representative Langevin have not made their position clear, and a few e-mails from some constituents might go a long way towards moving them forward.

Tight lines.

# FIN REAPER

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