

McMURRAY: BLUEFISH (from page 5)

Many perceive such a situation to be quite unfair.

BLUEFISH ALLOCATION AMENDMENT AND SCOPING

Because there's been quite a bit of concern over the allocation of the bluefish resource, the Council and the Commission have embarked on a "comprehensive review of the Bluefish Fishery Management Plan's (FMP) sector-based allocations, commercial allocations to the states, transfer processes, and goals and objectives." Currently we are in the "scoping" phase of a Bluefish Allocation Amendment.

The purpose of such scoping is to gather information from the public on what the issues are and what issues the amendment should address. It is "step one" in the amendment process.

Public hearings have been scheduled from June 20 to July 16. (RI hearing on July 12 -info at end)

So, it sounds like maybe there's an opportunity to get all of this sorted out... Or maybe not.

If the scoping hearings occur, and there is no significant input from the angling community, well, managers will decide that anglers just don't care about bluefish and that there is no problem reallocating fish released by anglers to the commercial side, to make sure the whole quota is killed. If that happens, the current 80/20 split may end up getting reversed, with the commercial sector getting the lion's share. That would be bad.

MANAGING FOR FISH IN THE WATER VS EXTRACTION

Anglers are likely the most important stakeholders in this fishery. Bluefish are often *really* important to me – to us! They

save seasons! And the recreational fishery, including the catch and release fishery, carries with it a significant economic component as far as tackle and fuel bought, trips taken, etc. On the other hand, bluefish are a relatively low-value commercial species, selling for less than 20% of the price commanded by more popular species such as striped bass, black sea bass and summer flounder. Managers need to know and understand

that the greatest economic value comes from those fish left swimming in the water, rather than from those piled dead on the dock.

That being the case, most of our quota can and should be used to maintain, perhaps even increase bluefish abundance, to support the great majority anglers who choose to release their catch.

The recreational quota shouldn't simply be based on the fish that anglers extract, because such an approach does not reflect the realities of the recreational bluefish fishery. Anyone with even a remote understanding

of the recreational bluefish fishery should get that.

Still, managers are accustomed to managing for extraction. The reality is that managing for fish in the water is something so foreign to managers that they aren't likely to even consider this unless we weigh in during scoping, in good numbers. In fact, there wasn't a mention of it in the scoping document until we flagged it.

We need to get ahead of this one to make sure we get heard. I'm going to provide comprehensive info below on how to comment, but before we get to that, I want to explain why this is bigger than just bluefish.

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Most recreational anglers prefer to release bluefish to live and fight another day. Those fish should not be transferred to the commercial fishery to be killed.

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