

## OF SLOWER BOATS (from page 7)

I started fishing for tautog decades ago, when the fish were very abundant and not subject to much fishing pressure. They were the “big game” of my youth, before striped bass and bluefish became regular targets. During the spring and the fall, we caught dozens of them from shore, and when we targeted them from a boat, no depthfinder or GPS was needed; we just anchored up over any rocky bottom or, when we were being extra diligent, maybe used some rough shore bearings to get closer to a particular pile of stones. And we caught tautog by the score.

You can't do that anymore. But if you're a good fisherman—and the party and charter boat fishermen at the ASMFC meeting were, if nothing else, very good fishermen—and you have a good set of GPS numbers for some wrecks and rockpiles, you can still anchor up over structure that holds enough fish to keep your customers busy. That doesn't mean that there are “plenty” of fish around; it just means that someone who knows how to catch tautog, buys good equipment and knows how to use it, can still catch some fish when the population is down.

Their success leads them to believe that there are still a lot of fish around and, often, that scientists don't know what they're doing when they say that the stock is depleted and in need of additional protection.

Perhaps worse, they believe that the current state of the fishery is normal, and forget how much more abundant fish used to be—and could be again, if managers are given the power to do the right thing.

### Scientists call it the “shifting baseline syndrome.”

The phrase was first used by Daniel Pauly in 1995, who wrote that “each generation of fisheries scientists accepts as a baseline the stock size and species composition that occurred at the beginning of their careers, and uses this to evaluate changes. When the next generation starts its career, the stocks have further declined, but it is the stocks at that time that serve as a new baseline. The result obviously is a gradual shift of the baseline, a gradual accommodation of the creeping disappearance of resource species...”

What is true for fisheries scientists is even more true for fishermen, who have their views of abundance distorted not only by time, but by improvements in boats, techniques and gear that allow them to catch a larger percentage of what few fish remain.

I see the “syndrome” affect people's view of the southern New England cod fishery. I first codfished out of Rhode Island in the 1960s, aboard the *Sea Squirrel*, an old party boat that took 2 ½ hours to travel from the harbor at Galilee to Cox' Ledge, about 25 miles offshore. We had non-stop fishing that day, and my father shared the “pool”—the prize for the biggest fish of the day—with another passenger after they landed an identical pair of 35-pound cod.

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## NOAA PENTONY (from page 12)

In doing so, they have implemented successful, innovative approaches to protecting and restoring stocks, habitat, and marine mammals. They also paved the way for an expansion of the aquaculture industry in the region by working hard to break through barriers to that industry,” said Oliver.

Before joining NOAA Fisheries in 2002, Mr. Pentony worked for five years as a policy analyst for the New England Fishery Management Council, primarily on issues related to habitat, marine protected areas, and the deep-sea red crab fishery.

He has a Bachelor of Science in Engineering from Duke University in North Carolina, and a Master's of Environmental Management from the Nicholas School of the Environment at Duke University. Between college and graduate school, Mr. Pentony served for six years as an officer in the United States Air Force as an engineering project manager on a variety of military satellite and launch vehicle programs.

Michael grew up in the town of Point Pleasant, New Jersey, where he spent his summers fishing for bluefish and fluke at the Manasquan Inlet. He currently lives in New Hampshire with his family including his wife and daughter. In his free time he enjoys traveling with his family, cheering on his daughter at swim meets, cycling the back roads of New Hampshire, and trying to learn to play the bass guitar.