



The Watch

Doug MacPherson, Chairman



The RISAA Legislative Committee’s mission is to provide, in partnership with the Affiliated Clubs, a forum for improving the knowledge and understanding of fishery-related and government issues that affect recreational anglers. An informed membership encourages involvement and advocacy. The Legislative Committee will strive to advocate responsible fishery decision.

The Committee is comprised of RISAA Members and delegates from the Affiliated Clubs. The Committee meets two or three times a year, depending on the number of fishery and/or legislative issues that develop.

Where did our fluke go?



On March 11 there was a public hearing for both recreational and commercial fishing proposals to be submitted to the Rhode Island Marine Fisheries Council (RIMFC) for final approval to be held on April 1. As I have previously published, the anticipated recreational proposal for the upcoming season for summer flounder is status quo with no changes.

HOWEVER.....

The imposition of a coastwide status quo for recreational summer flounder was a bit puzzling due to the major imbalance in the actual number of fish we will be allowed to catch while the commercial allowed catch was increased by 70 percent.

That number was published in an ASMFC news release on March 11. The news release refers to a new Stock Assessment Workshop, just completed, updating the estimates of the biomass for summer flounder.

Commercial limits for summer flounder in Rhode Island, as well as other proposed changes in the current commercial regulations, will be finalized at the council meeting (RIMFC).

So, back to the stock assessment to try to figure out why recreational fishing is seeing no increase in quota.

The assessment report conclusion was that the stock was *“not overfished and overfishing is not occurring.”*

There are several red flags also mentioned in the assessment that would seem to lead to questions about the conclusion that overfishing is not occurring. The actual number of fish has declined from the late 2000’s, plus there are decreasing trends in average length and weight at a given age for both sexes and mortality is higher than new entries into the population. It was

also noted that the number of recruitments has been below average over the last 7 years and that both commercial and recreational landings have decreased each year over the last five years.

So how the heck did we get here?

I will quote directly from the ASMFC news release:

“A key attribute of the assessment is the incorporation of REVISED recreational catch data. In July of 2018, MRIP revised the previous recreational catch estimates with a calibrated 1982-2017 time series that corresponds to the new MRIP survey methods. For comparison with the previous estimates, the revised estimates of 2017 recreational landings and discards are

over three times the previous estimates. The revised recreational catch estimates increased the 1982-2017 total annual catch by an average of 29 percent, ranging from 11 percent increase in 1989 to a 46 percent increase in 2017. **The increase in estimated removals resulted in an increased population estimate compared to previous assessments”.**

So even though we did get a 70% increase in quota, we are now being held accountable

for overfishing according to the new MRIP calibrations and we get no additional catch allowance. And that 70 percent increase is also based upon the assumption that we must have caught more fish because the population is larger, or we couldn’t have caught them.

The ASMFC has also recommended that these allowances remain in place for not only the upcoming season, but also for the next two years “to maintain regulatory stability.”

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