

# Striped bass center stage at Council meeting

## Capt. David Monti



The Rhode Island Marine Fisheries Council (RIMFC) met March 2 to make recreational and commercial fishing regulation recommendations to the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) for the 2020 fishing season.

An update on what the Council recommended appears below. However, it is important to note that DEM **Director Janet Coit** takes council recommendations, public comments and input from the Marine Affairs Division into consideration when making her final decisions.

At press time final regulations have not been made. The hope is we have them by month's end. About 95 percent of RIMFC decisions are made state fishing law by the Director.

Many of the regulations the Council recommended this year had very little wiggle room or little state of RI discretion as harvest limits were established by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) that manages fish coastwide in state waters 0 to 3 miles from shore.

### Scup, black sea bass and summer flounder

According to the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) that provides data for the establishment of recreational harvest estimates and limits, they now have more robust recreational data. Better data has been obtained through a change in methodology... the use of mail surveys to homes and an enhanced number of intercept surveys at docks, boat ramps and on charter and party boats.

The new data indicates recreational anglers have been harvesting a lot more than fish managers thought. In some cases twice as many are being harvested than originally thought. The more robust data will likely lead to more restrictive harvest limits, but this year NOAA gave the ASMFC a pass until they review and possibly adjust allocations which will impact harvest limits in a negative or positive way for the 2021 fishing season.

NOAA has given the Commission a pass on scup, black sea bass and summer flounder for 2020 as long as regulations remain status quo (same regulations as 2019).

Here are the Council's status quo recommendations.

• **SUMMER FLOUNDER:** six fish/person/day, 19" minimum size, May 3 to Dec. 31, in 'special' shore locations two fish of the allowed limit can be 17". Visit [www.dem.ri.gov](http://www.dem.ri.gov) for a list of 'special' areas.

• **BLACK SEA BASS:** three fish/person/day June 24 through August 31 and seven fish/person/day September 1 through December 31, 15" minimum size.

• **SCUP:** 30 fish/person/day, 9" minimum in 'special' shore areas an 8" fish is allowed

• **BLUFISH:** New regulations were handed down to the states from the



ASMFC as bluefish are *overfished* and *overfishing is occurring*. The new regulation is three fish/person/day for private anglers, and five fish/angler/day for party and charter boat customers. No minimum sizes allows for a snapper blue fishery, however, it is still three fish per angler (child or adult).

• **STRIPED BASS:** The Council voted to recommend a controversial conservation equivalency proposal of a 30" to <40" slot for party and charter boats and a more restrictive slot of 32" to < 40" for private anglers.

*(editors note: the < symbol means "less than", so <40" means a fish could measure 39 7/8th inch and be legal, but at 40 inches it is illegal)*

The Rhode Island Saltwater Anglers Association and many private anglers coastwide supported the same regulation adopted by our neighboring states of CT, MA and NY... one fish/person/day at a slot size of 28" to < 35". This is the preferred option approved by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission.



**Peter Jenkins believes RI should have a 28" to <35" slot to be consistent with the other northeast states from ME to NY**

Rhode Island worked hard to get a larger fish for the party & charter boat industry though 'conservation equivalency' rule that allows states to break from coastwide recommendations.

**Nicole Lengyel Costa**, DEM Marine Principal Biologist, said at the Council meeting, "Conservation equivalency proposals look good on paper as they must meet or surpass proposed harvest reductions." However, conservation equivalency has proven to fail in reality and there are no consequences when they do fail. In 2018 the State of Maryland's overfished their conservation equivalency striped bass limit by 215 percent.

**Dan McKiernan**, acting director of the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries, sent a public letter to **Jason McNamee**, RI Resources Deputy Director, *asking that Rhode Island not approve* striped bass conservation equivalency options. (to page 24)



**Nicole Costa**