



Rhode Island Saltwater Anglers Association
LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

The Watch

Richard
Hittinger
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.

Turning thoughts to marine plastic pollution

FISHERIES ISSUES

Well, I think the big push on critical rules governing key recreational species is slowing a bit for now.

In the past 2 months our Legislative Committee has met with the RI delegation to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC).

We reviewed and commented on the Reallocation proposal for fluke, black sea bass, and scup as well as on the Public Information Document for a Striped Bass Amendment 7 and the Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment. We also held 2 informational Zoom sessions on these key issues.

RI LEGISLATIVE BILL PROMPTS OCEAN TRASH DISCUSSION

Looking at relevant bills before the Rhode Island Legislature recently, **Steve Skenyon**, our Legislative Committee Bill Tracking Volunteer identified **House Bill No. 5376** a bill that prohibits the release of balloons inflated with lighter-than-air gas - subject to \$250 fine. As anyone who has spent much time out on the water will tell you, these mylar balloons are always seen out there.

Steve said, "Several years ago, I found out the discarded shiny mylar balloons floating in Block Island Sound are often mistaken for jelly fish and eaten by sea turtles resulting in their sickness or death. I started picking up the floating mylar balloons during my fishing trips to Block Island. During the summer/fall of 2018 I picked up 12 mylar balloons, in 2019 I picked up 9, and last year a record 32."

I certainly agree with Steve and so do many others on the Legislative Committee.

Greg Vespe, another active Legislative Committee member said, "Mylar balloons offshore are absolutely a marine health risk. I always stop and pick up the number of balloons for the number of crew on my boat each trip I make offshore. I would get more, but frankly would spend the trip just picking up balloons."

This Bill is currently "Held for Review" in the House Judiciary Committee, so if you want to support it, contact someone on the House Judiciary Committee and tell them:

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/ComMembers/ComMemr.asp?ComChoiceR=HJUD>

THE PROBLEM IS LARGER THAN WE MAY THINK

This makes me think of the problem of plastics in the ocean more generally. We see the balloons more than some of the

other materials because they float above the water and they are usually very colorful, but it is only a part of the problem. According to an online report by Condor Ferries of the UK:

- There is now 5.25 trillion macro and micro pieces of plastic in our ocean & 46,000 pieces in every square mile of ocean, weighing up to 269,000 tons.
- Every day around 8 million pieces of plastic make their way into our oceans.
- Between 8 to 14 million tons enters our ocean every year.
- 1 in 3 fish caught for human consumption contains plastic.
- Marine plastic pollution has affected 100% of marine turtles, 59% of whales, 36% of seals and 40% of seabirds of those examined.
- More than two-thirds of the world's fish stocks are suffering from plastic ingestion.

Some have estimated that over 100,000 marine mammals and over 1 million seabirds are killed by ocean plastic every year.

In addition to this, 100% of baby sea turtles sampled by biologists have plastics in their stomachs. With so many animals mistaking plastic items and particles for food, or becoming entangled, the impact of plastic waste on marine life has become a global crisis.

We all need to do our part to stop plastic pollution from entering the marine environment. Since most of the plastic entering the ocean comes from stormwater runoff the first and best way to reduce plastics in the ocean is to stop littering and pick up materials that are already on the ground before they are washed into storm drains or ditches and into streams and rivers and bays.

Even those light weight plastic bags should be tied in a knot or filled with other trash before disposal so that they don't come loose and blow away during trash handling or compaction at the landfill.

JOIN RISAA LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

All RISAA members are welcome to join the RISAA Legislative Committee. If you are interested or if you have any questions, you can contact me by email at hittinger@risaa.org

