

McMURRY: BLUEFISH (from page 35)

THE LARGER ISSUES

Managers should understand and seriously consider the value of fish left in the water in general, instead of simply developing regulations that allow special interests to extract the max amount possible. Not just for bluefish, but for every recreationally important fishery. While bluefish is drawing a pretty good example here right now, there are lots of others. King mackerel anglers went through a similar reallocation process a few years ago, for just the same reasons. Striped bass could also fall victim to the same mindset, but arguably it applies to any fish that anglers pursue primarily for sport, rather than food.

That would be a serious threat to the recreational fishery because, to be successful, anglers need fish in the water – a lot of fish. We use the least efficient gear, and so we need abundance. Just having an abundance of fish in the water to catch is far more important than smaller size limits and larger bag limits or how many fish we can kill. NOAA surveys have indicated as much.

Thus, the fact that anglers value “experience” above mere extraction should be acknowledged, emphasized and better accounted for when developing management measures. And that is what anglers should be pushing for.

But, as a group, we aren’t. At least some of us aren’t. While conservation and leaving-fish-in-the-water certainly used to be a priority to the angling community, without a doubt, some organizations purporting to represent us have shifted focus towards extraction, and that’s unfortunate.

Such organizations have it right that the current system caters to the commercial side. Bluefish is a case in point. But where they don’t have it right is their insistence that they need to be able to kill more fish in order to make the recreational fishing industry (tackle and boat manufacturers, etc.) more viable, when emphasis should clearly be on the angler opportunity that comes from leaving more fish alive!

Why that shift from conservation to extraction? Well, it’s beyond me.

I’ve heard all the reasons, but they make little sense. Despite how it’s being spun, both the Modern Fish Act and the Strengthening Fishing Communities and Increasing Flexibility in Fisheries Management Act are about easing conservation and management language in the Magnuson-Stevens Act, to allow higher harvests and delay stock rebuilding. There is no provision that I’m aware of in either of those two bills that seeks to keep more fish in the water.

Aggressively trying to weaken federal fishery management law through “flexibility” – loopholes that allow overfishing – while claiming it would improve access to fish is bad policy. Loopholes = overfishing = less fish in the water; commercial fishermen gain access, anglers lose it. With less precautionary management and greater flexibility to allow overfishing, we’re likely screwed.

And speaking of bluefish, this is a ripe issue for those organizations to become engaged in, perhaps expressing to managers how important keeping these fish in the water is to their constituents. I’m not holding my breath, though.

IN THE END

Bluefish are damn important to the angling community.

I’m not talking about dead bluefish, I’m talking about the live ones, swimming around in the water right now. The ones that tail in two or three feet of water. The ones that make my son scream like a crazy person when a big’un smashes his topwater plug (much like his Dad does).

Keeping a lot of those fish swimming around in the water for the economically important recreational sector should be a priority for managers. We need to weigh in so they understand that.

But in a larger context the entire idea of keeping fish in the water, for the encounters and the recreational experience, should be returned to the forefront of recreational advocacy, way ahead of pushing for laws that seek merely to increase the kill.

But that’s a long-term goal. For now, let’s focus on bluefish.



Please show up at your state’s hearing to talk about the importance of leaving a few bluefish in the water.

And if you can’t?

Please submit written comments by July 30, 2018.

Written comments may be sent by any of the following methods:

- <http://www.mafmc.org/comments/bluefish-allocation-amendment>
- EMAIL: mseeley@mafmc.org (Please include “Bluefish Amendment Scoping Comments” in the subject line.)
- MAIL: Chris Moore, Ph.D., Executive Director, Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, North State Street, Suite 201, Dover, DE 19901

HERE ARE THE LOCAL HEARINGS:

Connecticut

Tuesday, July 10, 7:00 PM. CT DEEP Boating Center, 333 Ferry Rd, Old Lyme, CT

Massachusetts

Wednesday, July 11, 6:00 PM. Plymouth Public Library, Otto Fehlow Room, 132 South St, Plymouth, MA

Rhode Island

Thursday, July 12, 6:00 PM. Corless Auditorium URI Narragansett Bay Campus, South Ferry Rd, Narragansett, RI

HERE’S WHAT TO SAY

It’s pretty simple.

- Describe how bluefish in the water, not the dead ones, are important to you.
- Explain how instead of being punished for releasing fish and having our quota transferred to the commercial sector, at least part of our quota should be in the form of fish left in the water.

And that’s about it. **Do it now...** And thanks for reading.