

RI Marine Fisheries Council
Minutes of the
Menhaden Advisory Panel Meeting
January 21, 2009 -6:00 PM

Fish and Wildlife Marine Lab Conference Room
Jamestown, RI

There were 8 people present

S. Medeiros, Chair

M. Bucko*

D. Beutel¹

E. Cook

J. Souza¹

R. Jobin *

B. Ferioli *

L. Lachance *

Jason McNamee, RIDFW

R. Souza

*Panel member who could vote at meeting

¹ Panel member but not voting at this meeting

S. Medeiros opened the meeting. He noted that there were 4 of the possible 8 voting members present, which is half, but if you include D. Beutel, a non-voting member, there was a majority of participants. The first agenda topic was a review of the 2008 menhaden fishery. J. McNamee had a presentation that he went through (see attached). The presentation covered the first three agenda items. In summary the commercial fishery began in May and concluded by late July. Participants were both floating fish traps and purse seine vessels. J. McNamee also showed two fishery independent indices developed by the RI Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW). The indexes indicated increasing trends in the most recent years, although both indexes were down in 2008. The commercial purse seine vessels landed approximately half of their allowed cap (cap = 50% of “total” Narragansett Bay (Bay) abundance). The “total” abundance in the Bay in 2008 was approximately twice as much as what was seen in 2007.

The next agenda topic was a review of the 2008 RI DFW monitoring program. In summary the regulations that were promulgated in early 2008 required that the fishery be monitored. This was accomplished with two observers, one sampling the floating fish traps and the other sampling the purse seine operations including over flights with the spotter pilot. In 2008, only one flight was observed, however, all of the spotter pilot reports were collected for the model. The data collected from these sources were fed in to the model developed by M. Gibson (Acting Chief, RI DFW) and the landings information was compared to the harvest cap as defined by the model. Regulations require that if the harvest cap is met, the fishery closes. The harvest cap was not met in 2008. J. McNamee wanted to note that the DFW has lost both of their full time observers from staff, therefore monitoring was going to be difficult in 2009. That being said, the DFW would do its best to maintain an adequate level of observer coverage, and would endeavor to observe more overflights in 2009.

The group moved on to a discussion of the regulations that went in to effect in 2008 and began to discuss any proposed regulation modifications for 2009. There were no proposed modifications to the regulations made by the DFW. J. McNamee noted that the model may be perfected further; however this would not substantially change the inputs or functioning of the model. S. Medeiros had some questions about the model, namely how the cap was set. J. McNamee stated that the cap was dynamic until it reached its highest amount, at which point the cap was locked in. S. Medeiros stated that he thought the cap also moved down as the fish left. J. McNamee stated that he was also under this impression until he took manual charge of the model in 2008, but went on to say that it would be extremely difficult to manage a fishery in this way as the cap may adjust below where current landings were, thereby creating an overage. There was further discussion on this topic.

S. Medeiros asked if there were any alternate proposals for the 2009 regulations. L. Lachance suggested making a landings requirement for fishermen to maintain their purse seine endorsement. J. McNamee stated that the licensing regulations had been promulgated for 2009, but he would include this suggestion in the advisory panel minutes so that the Council would be advised of the proposal so that they may take it up if they wished. This would be a change that would have to go back out to public hearing through the licensing regulations, not the management regulations that they were discussing that evening.

The group discussed the current regulations a little further, but decided to recommend status quo for 2009. This was a group consensus.

One final recommendation from the panel that they wished to go forward to the Council was to make sure there was an equipment inspection of any purse seine operations that came in to the Bay. J. Souza of Ark Bait stated that DEM enforcement was welcome to check their equipment whenever they would like.

S. Medeiros adjourned the meeting.