

JCAA NEWSPAPER FEBRUARY 2017

Official Newspaper of the *JERSEY COAST ANGLERS ASSOCIATION*

(Published on January 23rd, 2017)

Monthly Meeting at Jersey Coast Shark Anglers, 385 Herbertsville Road, Brick
"WORKING FOR MARINE RECREATIONAL ANGLERS"

JCAA REGULAR MEETING:

Tuesday, January 31st, 2017

Starting at 7:30 PM

At Jersey Coast Shark Anglers

NEXT JCAA BOARD MEETING

Thursday, February 9th, 2017

Starting at 7:30 PM at JCAA Office

OFFICIAL NEWSPAPER OF THE JERSEY COAST ANGLERS ASSOC.

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This publication is printed and mailed one week prior to each regular monthly meeting of the Jersey Coast Anglers Association. One of the prime goals of JCAA is to get accurate information into public hands as soon as possible.

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**JCAA General Membership Meetings are for club representatives and invited guests only. These meetings are not open to the general public. If you would like to attend as a guest, call the President at 908-913-0551 or Tom Fote at (732) 270-9102 before the meeting date to ask permission.**

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**Committee and Chairpersons listed on last page**

## **IMPORTANT DATES**

**January 31<sup>st</sup> JCAA General Meeting**

**February 9<sup>th</sup> JCAA Board Meeting**

**February 25<sup>th</sup> Saltwater National Seminar Series**

**February 28<sup>th</sup> JCAA General Meeting**

**March 2<sup>nd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> Atlantic City Boat Show**

**March 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> Saltwater Expo**

## **President's Report**

*By John Toth*

The most pressing issue at the moment is the possibility that we may have a **19-inch minimum size for fluke in 2017 along with a 2 to 3 fish bag limit and a reduced season!** The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Commission (MAMFC) held a public hearing at the Galloway Twp. public library on January 5th to take comments on their proposal for it. The place was packed with anglers, with many of them not being able to get into the room. Why the MAMFC continually holds their public meetings in a room with limited seating capacity is a mystery, especially on a hot topic like this!

Given the anger and frustration that anglers were feeling over this issue, this meeting was held in a relatively calm manner due to Tom Fote who chaired it and asked for restraint. MAMFC's Kirby Rootes-Murdy gave a presentation on why these new regulations are necessary. Anglers were asked by Tom to comment on the details of this presentation and then to state their personal comments on it. Not surprisingly, anglers commented that these new regulations will decimate the party/charter boat industry along with associated industries like tackle shops. Other comments included: why are we killing breeders since fluke that size are all female and that while most anglers follow the law, these new regulations will turn them into pirates and take undersized fish. The data to justify these regulations

was questioned and even Adam Nowalsky, a Mid-Atlantic Marine Commissioner, indicated that the data presented to justify these new regulations is flawed! (At the request of the MAMFC, comments on these regulations were sent to it that are also in this newsletter. These comments were prepared by myself and JCAA's Paul Haertel).

The position of the JCAA is that these new regulations are not only injurious to the fishing industry, but they are **not needed** and that we want the status quo - 5 fish, 18 inches and a 125-day season. The JCAA is also working with other people and groups to oppose these terrible regulations and they include: the Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA), the New Jersey Outdoor Alliance (NJOA), United Boatman, Save Our Summer Flounder and other groups and individuals.

I chaired a meeting on January 10th with many of the above individuals at the Shark Anglers Building in Herbertsville and Zach McCue from Senator Booker's staff was invited to it. The purpose of this meeting is to get Senator Booker to support us in fighting these new regulations. Senator Booker is on the Commerce Committee that oversees NOAA and he has a voice with the incoming Trump administration's new Commerce Secretary. Hopefully, he can use his influence in this capacity to stop these regulations. Mr. McCue listened to what we had to say and will take this information back to the Senator. We will be setting up a meeting with the Senator at his Newark office in the near future to enlist his support. Before I go any further, I want to **thank members of the Shark Anglers** for allowing us to meet in their building! They set up the room for us and were very gracious hosts!

A conference call with DEP Commissioner Martin's staff (David Glass), and persons involved in stopping this 19-inch issue, was held on January 13th to gain the support of Commissioner Martin and possibly our Governor to stay with the status quo and stop the new regulations from taking place. We also want New York and Connecticut to also get on board like New Jersey to have a united front with the three states in opposing these regulations.

Working with our legislators, resolutions were introduced on January 19th in the NJ Assembly to stop the regulations and also requesting a new benchmark assessment to be done on fluke to get the data right. I have also heard that many of our legislators are up in arms over this 19-inch travesty

and you will hear more about their support since our state's fishing industry is in jeopardy.

So, there are **many** efforts underway to halt the implementation of these horrendous regulations. **Don't give up hope yet!** More to follow on this important issue and the JCAA will keep you updated on it.

I want to also **thank** the Manasquan River Marlin & Tuna club for donating \$1,000 to the JCAA's treasury. Ken Warchal presented this check at the JCAA's January Board meeting. Donations like this helps the JCAA in running its operations (mailings, newsletters, office rentals, etc.) in its efforts to protect our fisheries.

## Fisheries Management & Legislative Report

*By Tom Fote*

### Summer Flounder Hearing

On January 5<sup>th</sup>, the ASMFC held a hearing in NJ. Luckily snow was in the forecast so the crowd was only 170. The Galloway Public Library had seats for about 80 so some left when they could not get into the room but about 70 stood for the whole hearing. This hearing could have gotten out of hand but the anglers conducted themselves with true class and made me proud. When Adam Nowalski asked if anyone in the room wanted to talk about an option, not one hand was raised in support of any option. They did not believe any reduction should take place until the next Bench Mark Stock Assessment takes place, so they support status quo. They are in good company. Below you will see a letter from Senator Cory Booker (D) and Robert Menendez (D) and Congressmen Frank Pallone (D), Frank Lobiondo (R), and Tom Macarthur (R) saying the same thing. There are two resolutions, AR206 & AR205, going through the NJ Assembly. One is by Assemblyman David Rible (R Wall) and the other one is by Assemblyman Vince Mazzeo (D Atlantic). Both resolutions pretty much say status quo until the next assessment is done. AR206 was voted out of committee on January 19. Senators Bob Smith (D) and Kip Bateman (R) are sponsoring a similar resolution in the NJ Senate that calls on NMFS to maintain status quo. I met with DEP Commissioner and the Fish and Wild staff and several recreational groups and everyone supported Status Quo including Commissioner Martin. I usually do not put party affiliation next to legislator's names but I wanted to

show that this is a real bi-partisan effort both at the state and federal level. The other great thing that has happened is it has brought the recreational groups in New Jersey and the national groups working together. If other states do the same, we can get a lot accomplished.

### **New Jersey Bureau of Marine Fisheries Budget**

New Jersey's recreational anglers are working hard and united to stop the reduction in the Summer Flounder fishery for 2017. The recreational anglers need to do the same for New Jersey's Bureau of Marine Fisheries Budget (NJBMF). I have mentioned many times over the years that the NJBMF budget in 1981 was 3.1 million dollars. There were no saltwater recreational management plans in effect so they were directing the efforts on commercial fisheries and research on the fish stocks of NJ. When I was appointed to the NJ Marine Fisheries Council in the late eighties there were management plans for striped bass recreationally by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) protecting the 1982 year class with its constant raising of the size and bag limits and a 14 inch size limit on summer flounder and federal regulations on bluefin tuna. The Striped Bass Emergency Act was passed in 1984 and required ASMFC to regulate and put in a management plan to rebuild the stocks. The states were required to work together and to fill the data gaps to effectively manage and rebuild the striped bass stock. The Striped Bass Management Plan required NJ to do a lot more sampling and stock assessment work. This cost money but the good news was the Federal Government through the US Fish and Wildlife Agency (USF&W) and National Marine Fishery Service (NMFS) were given a lot of money to pass on to the states through grants to accomplish the stock assessment requirement of the plan. In 1990 I was appointed to the ASMFC and things had not changed much in recreational management. The exception was the start of ASMFC and Mid-Atlantic Marine Fisheries Council initiating management plans for bluefish, summer flounder, scup and black sea bass. Those plans moved forward but with very sketchy data. With the passage of the Atlantic Coast Conservation Act, everything changed. ASMFC now had the power to ask the Secretary of Commerce to put in a moratorium for any state that

did not follow the plan. Instead of implementing just two management plans at the state level, states were now required to implement plans for multiple species without any additional funding. Today we almost have a management plan that requires a lot of work for the state. Yes, money was given to ASMFC to implement the plans but the funding sent to the states was not sufficient to do the job required. Everyone assumed the states would pick up the slack since there was a vested interest in the states to protect the fishery. While it may have worked somewhere else, it definitely did not work in New Jersey. Instead we lower the budget and reduced the number of persons working there. In the last two years, the budget for the Bureau of Marine Fisheries is below the 1981 budget by 1.2 million dollars. And the number of people working for Marine Fisheries is about 25% of what we had in 1981. As a result, the dedicated employees of the Bureau of Marine Fisheries are not given the tools they need to do the job. As people leave to retire or find more fulfilling employment, no one is taking their place. I know people who left because of the frustration of not seeing any future in a job that is chronically underfunded.

How do we correct this problem? The short-term solution is for you to reach out to your Senators and Assemblymen and women to ask them to make sure the 2017 budget has a line item specifically for the Bureau of Marine Fisheries. They also need to work to remove the cap so all staff positions can be filled. That is not enough to solve the problem because returning the budget to 3.1 million is just 1980 dollars. In the long term we need to find a way to increase the Bureau of Marine Fisheries budget, not just for the recreational community but for the commercial anglers and the general public who love to go fishing. The work being done by the Bureau of Marine Fisheries will get only more challenging when we feel more of the impact of the warming of the oceans. We need to act now to prevent even more problems in the future. I know how much effort you are all putting in to maintaining the status quo for summer flounder. You need to double that effort in fighting for a proper budget for the Bureau of Marine Fisheries. JCAA is already working with legislators on this issue. Remember, every one of our Senators and Assemblymen/women are up for reelection in 2017. It is up to us to make this a campaign issue.

## NJ Assembly Resolution 206

**AN ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION** urging the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to conduct a new summer flounder assessment before implementing any catch limits for 2017.

**WHEREAS**, New Jersey fisheries are ranked among the best in the nation and it is estimated that there are as many as one million recreational saltwater anglers fishing in New Jersey; and

**WHEREAS**, Of the many varieties of fish found off of New Jersey's shores, summer flounder are among the most sought after saltwater fish along the Atlantic Coast; and

**WHEREAS**, Summer flounder fisheries are managed cooperatively by the states through the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC); and

**WHEREAS**, Together, these managing entities are responsible for developing summer flounder fishery regulations as part of the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Fishery Management Plan; and

**WHEREAS**, The management plan is implemented through regulations adopted by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), a division of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) within the Department of Commerce; and

**WHEREAS**, The management plan is designed to ensure the protection and maintenance of the summer flounder stock, primarily through the establishment of harvest limits, which are based on the most current stock assessment report published by NOAA; and

**WHEREAS**, Based on the 2016 Stock Assessment Update, the ASMFC and MAFMC have recommended a 40 percent cut in catch limits for the 2017 and 2018 summer flounder fishing seasons; and

**WHEREAS**, Highlighting NOAA's heavy reliance on random sampling to gather data for the 2016 stock assessment report, a bipartisan group of legislators from New Jersey, including United States Congressmen Frank Pallone, Jr., Frank LoBiondo, and Tom MacArthur and United States Senators Cory Booker and Robert Menendez, have expressed concern about the accuracy of the estimates contained in the report and have questioned the need to implement such a drastic reduction in catch limits for the upcoming season; and

**WHEREAS**, The Department of Environmental Protection has expressed similar concerns, warning that the drastic reduction in catch limits will devastate recreational and commercial fishing in New Jersey and have a detrimental effect on the economy of the New Jersey shore, particularly as the State continues to recover from Superstorm Sandy; and

**WHEREAS**, Many communities along the New Jersey shore that rely heavily on fishing are already struggling, in part, due to reduced summer flounder quotas from prior years; and

**WHEREAS**, According to the Jersey Coast Anglers Association, from 2007 to 2014, New Jersey lost two million fishing trips, 40 percent of which were in pursuit of summer flounder; and

**WHEREAS**, Despite significant opposition to the recommended reduction in summer flounder catch limits, and the potential for severe economic damage to the State, at the end of December 2016, the NMFS adopted a rule implementing the recommended reduction in summer flounder catch limits for the 2017 and 2018 fishing seasons; now, therefore,

**BE IT RESOLVED** by the General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:

1. This House respectfully urges the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to immediately conduct a new summer flounder assessment and refrain from enforcing the reduced summer flounder catch limit until a new benchmark assessment of the summer flounder stock has been conducted.
2. Copies of this resolution, as filed with the Secretary of State, shall be transmitted by the Clerk of the General Assembly to the President of the United States, the Chair of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, the Chairman of the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, the Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, the Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, the Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere, and every member of Congress elected from the State of New Jersey.

### STATEMENT

This resolution urges the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to immediately conduct a new summer flounder assessment and refrain from enforcing a reduction in summer flounder

catch limits until a new benchmark assessment has been conducted.

Based on the 2016 Stock Assessment Update report published by NOAA, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council jointly recommended a reduction in summer flounder catch limits for the 2017 and 2018 seasons. The findings in the report were based largely on data obtained through random sampling. As a result, the assessments made are merely estimates which may not represent the actual status of the summer flounder stock.

Concerned parties, including the bill's sponsors and members of the New Jersey delegation to the United States Congress, warn that the significant reduction in catch limits could destroy the recreational and commercial summer flounder industries in the State, and cause tremendous harm to the economy of the New Jersey shore. Many communities along the New Jersey shore that rely heavily on fishing are already struggling, in part, due to reduced summer flounder quotas from prior years. According to the Jersey Coast Anglers Association, from 2007 to 2014, New Jersey lost two million fishing trips, 40 percent of which were in pursuit of summer flounder.

This resolution urges NOAA to conduct a new benchmark assessment of the summer flounder stock to ensure that the assessments are accurate, and a potentially-devastating reduction in summer flounder quotas is not implemented unnecessarily.

## Comments Submitted to ASMFC on Fluke Regulations

*By John Toth & Paul Haertel*

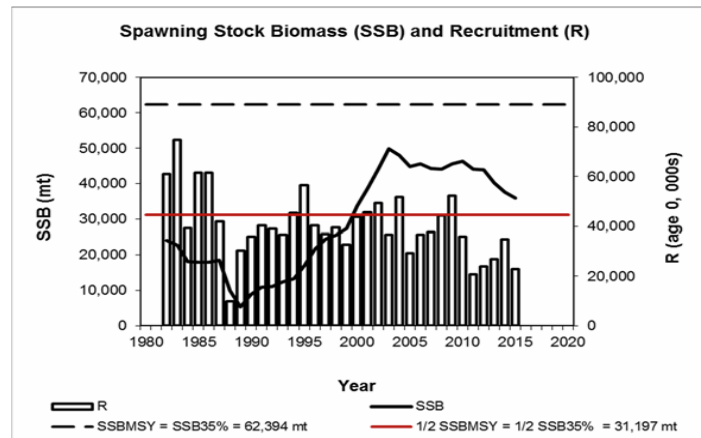
Kirby Rootes-Murdy, Senior FMP Coordinator  
Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission  
Subject: Draft Addendum XXVIII

Kirby,

The Jersey Coast Anglers Association is opposed to any of the options in draft addendum XXVIII as we believe they are unnecessary and would create a severe negative impact upon New Jersey's recreational fishing industry. Fluke is the most important recreational fish caught in our state and the draconian measures you are proposing would

result in a drastic decrease in the number of fluke fishing trips in our state. People who fish for fluke want to bring some fish home to eat. It is already very difficult for most people to catch an 18" fluke let alone a 19" one. This is particularly true for those who fish from shore or in the back bays. The 19" size limit coupled with only a 2 or 3 fish bag limit and a significantly shorter season will cripple if not destroy our charter and party boat industry as well as the tackle shops and other shore are businesses that depend on fluke fishermen.

JCAA believes in managing our fluke stocks so that they are sustainable and would be amongst the first to call for reduced quotas and tighter regulations if we felt they were in trouble. However, they are not in trouble as evidenced by the below chart which was copied from the addendum. The chart below shows that the target of 62,394 mt has never been achieved which indicates to us that is unattainable unless perhaps we completely stop all types of fishing. We urge that this target be lowered to approximately 50,000 mt as that is where the ssb peaked in the early 2000's. Then the threshold could be reduced accordingly and we would not be faced with these draconian measures. Further, this same chart shows that we had much better recruitment when the ssb was far lower and we were harvesting more and smaller fish. We should be allowed to harvest some of the smaller males while conserving more of the breeding sized females.



We understand that a new stock assessment is due out this year or in 2018. We believe that this will contain more accurate data which will aid you in better managing this fishery. We would also like to point out that sound fisheries management is dependent on compliance with the regulations. There are already many fishermen out there who just don't care what the regulations are anymore. They keep what they want and they know that their chances of being caught are

very slim. Still, the majority of fishermen are honest and abide by the rules. However, Addendum XXVIII has really touched a nerve in our fluke fishing community. People are very angry and fed up with broken promises of rebuilding stocks and relaxing regulations. The options you are proposing are the last straw and if enacted they are going to turn many more honest fishermen into pirates.

I also want to add that my fishing club, The Salt Water Anglers of Bergen County, had a booth at the Raritan Show in Edison (January 12-15) and I worked at it to promote my club and I had petitions for anglers to sign that are opposed to these stringent regulations. They were eager to sign it and most, if not all of them, KNEW about this issue and were MAD over it! Most of the comments I received were: "Don't they know that the charter/party boats will go out of business", "Fish this size are all females so why are they killing the breeders"! I also worked at the New Jersey Outdoor Alliance (NJOA) booth and I received the same type of comments. Sadly, I also heard from a number of anglers that they have given up fishing because of the increasing onerous regulations. I have not yet counted all of the names of the people who signed the petitions, but I have at least a thousand signatures if not more. Of course, this does not count the number of anglers who just passed by our booth and did not know about petitions to sign. But the main point here is that anglers do NOT want to see these new regulations in place! Not one angler expressed that these new regulations are needed or desired! The proposed regulations are touching a raw nerve of anglers that I have not seen before and they are ANGRY about it!

Therefore in conclusion and after considering all these above factors, we strongly recommend that you allow each region to continue to fish under its 2016 regulations while you develop a new addendum which incorporates the data which will come from the new stock assessment.

Sincerely,  
John Toth  
President, Jersey Coast Anglers Association (JCAA)  
President, New Jersey Outdoor Alliance (NJOA)  
President, Salt Water Anglers of Bergen County

## **Letter to ASMFC on Pending Fluke Regulations**

*By Nick Cicero, Manager for the Folsom  
Corporation*

Although I sit on the board of both The Save the Summer Flounder Fishery Fund and the Recreational Fishing Alliance my comments today are from the prospective of how the pending regulations will affect jobs and small businesses in New Jersey.

I'm the sales manager of the Folsom Corporation of Mahwah New Jersey. We have been a wholesale distributor and manufacturer of fishing tackle for over a 150 years! With offices in Mahwah, Tampa, New Orleans and Bentonville Arkansas we are one of the largest suppliers of fishing tackle in the country. We supply sporting goods stores, tackle shops, marinas, and chain stores throughout the country. At any given time, by looking at seasonal sales trends, I can clearly see where fishing activity for a particular species is vibrant and where angler catches, and angler gear purchases are less than normal!

And, I can clearly state that my records do not match the activity reported by the NMFS angler catch data.

Our New Jersey Folsom facility employees over 75 people who jobs depend on healthy recreational fisheries and the public's access to those stocks. In the last 15 years we have witnessed an unprecedented number of New Jersey tackle shop closures which has been, in part, triggered by the continued mismanagement of our resources by the very government that we have entrusted to watch over our saltwater fish stocks.

Gone are the days when tackle shops and the for-hire fleet were busy year round with anglers flocking to the shore to fish for Cod, Silver Hake, Red Hake, Winter Flounder and Boston Mackerel - all species that National Marine Fisheries Service and its regulatory initiatives has failed to restore to historically abundant levels! Compound the aforementioned loss of opportunity with the mismanagement of recreational quota for other critically important species like black sea bass, and scup whose numbers are thriving despite diminished

angler access including a controversial yet mandatory first-quarter closure on sea bass.

Today's surviving tackle shops and Charter and Party boats are operating on such truncated seasons, that is so weather dependent, that a few rainy summer weekends can make or break a season for these small businesses. The proposed loss of a normal fluke season will spell the last straw for many New Jersey businesses both on and off the water!

Besides, scup and sea bass, the summer flounder are one of the bright spots in the overall picture in both angler participation and rebuilt healthy stocks. Just a few short years ago we had a fluke population that was reported to be at an historical all time high and that success was achieved, it must be pointed out, by allowing anglers and commercial fisherman quotas that were almost three times higher than the quotas that will be implemented by these proposals!

And yet, in spite of this rebuilding in the past few seasons our quotas have been decimated with even bigger cuts proposed for next year. Reductions that are both scientifically unwarranted and factually unsubstantiated!

Why? Because decisions are being made without using the best available science or the best possible data! Recent information indicates that fluke populations are shifting northward and into deeper water yet the current NMFS data is not timely enough to incorporate those dynamic changes.

1. Because the reference points that NMFS assigned to Fluke are way too high and have been since their inception! What are reference points? Truth be told it is the contrived number of fluke that theoretically would exist in a utopian ocean that remained untouched by man, by pollution, weather, nursery habitat degradation and climate changes or forage base fluctuations. Point of fact is that many of today's most respected stock assessment scientists concur and now believe that we reached our historical summit in fluke population 5 of 6 years ago and that our current population is healthy and in no present danger what so ever.
2. Because for the last 6 years NMFS research Vessel Bigelow has consistently been returning catch data on young of the year fluke that is substantially lower than previous research vessels reported Not only is that issue one that

should have been questioned immediately, but more recently a review of the nets and techniques used by the Bigelow have come under scrutiny and the accuracy of the information is highly dubious at very best. Six years of low recruitment is what we're being told – But coincidentally, aren't those the same six years that the research vessel Bigelow has been conducting trawl surveys? Any real scientific protocol would warrant questioning "what's changed" rather than arbitrarily accepting new data without questioning its source or accuracy!

3. Because NMFS Recreational catch reporting is in fact nothing more than a government sponsored dartboard! The catches that have been reported in 2016 are so highly suspicious as to be comical if in fact people's very livelihoods were not in jeopardy! Not a person in this room has any faith in the data that has been supplied. To believe, as an example that Connecticut, who's anglers fish many of the same waters as Rhode Island went 3 times beyond their allowed catch while its sister state fell below is not anything that anyone with knowledge of both the fishery and the fishing pressure in both states would accept. No a single angler here believes New Jersey overfished as southern New Jersey continued to see good back bay fishing when the season was still closed in the spring and poor fishing during the open season as the fluke population continues its northward shift. We hear a lot about "peer review" needed of the science and data left on the cutting room floor and unusable by NOAA Fisheries – yet when will see a "peer review" of the recreational harvest survey changes clearly demanded by Congress over 10 years ago?
4. Because we are burdened with an outdated Stock Assessment. The last stock assessment is past its usefulness and we need a new benchmark assessment done before we can make any accurate determination on the size and distribution of the population. The newly developed sex specific model created by Dr Patrick Sullivan with funding from SSFFF and its partners needs to be incorporated as quickly as possible as it will produce a far more comprehensive and accurate look at the fishery than the currently used model.
5. Because the recent SSFFF Rutgers University onboard sex and length study results clearly detail what most fishermen already suspected which is that our current management strategy is putting

undue pressure on breeding female fluke and that we would be better off harvesting a cross section of the population that would include more males. Increasing the size limit as mandated in these proposals would do nothing but increase the number of breeding females caught and retained along with increasing the angler discards.

Based on these five key points, so filled with questionable data that is not well defined or scientifically substantiated I believe there's a sound argument to be made for asking NOAA Fisheries to approve "status quo" management on summer flounder this season, and to ask that they make every effort to fast track the required benchmark assessment and peer review using all the newest information available.

All of the options developed and put forward in Addendum 28 are done so under the guidance of a 3.77 million pound recreational harvest limit. Based on the key points detailed above, New Jersey's anglers and businesses do not believe the recreational harvest limit should be set at 3.77 million pounds so we can't support any of the options in the addendum.

In order to avoid this looming disaster the US Department of Commerce must revisit and reset the 2017 summer flounder ABC to 16.26 million pounds (status quo) and NOAA Fisheries must assume that we met, but did not exceed our recreational harvest limit in 2016.

On behalf of the recreational fishermen of New Jersey and those of us in our coastal sport fishing industry, I respectfully ask our state representatives at ASFMC and the Council to respond as such to the federal fisheries service.

Tell them clearly that these options as presented are not supported by, or are in the interest of the angling public or the good people of New Jersey.

Best Regards,  
Nick Cicero  
Sales Manager | Folsom Corp.  
Tel: 201-529-3550 | Fax: 201-529-0291

## **Comments on the Draft Addendum XXVIII to the Summer Flounder, Scup, Sea Bass Fishery Management Board**

*By Phil Simon*

There are several issues with the stock assessment update that create a great deal of uncertainty in the findings of the Science and Statistical Committee and their recommendations to the ASMFC and the MAFMC, and their corrective measures involving severe cutbacks to the ABC and Total harvests for New Jersey, New York, and the other states on the east coast. I am especially concerned that the updated stock assessment fails to recognize the increased role of habitat degradation and reduced juvenile fish survival in the observed reductions in stock biomass and recruitment (see paragraph 3c below). Therefore, I support the recent letter submitted to Secretary Penny Pritzker by Senators Menendez and Booker, and Congressmen Pallone, Lobiando, and MacArthur, to reconsider implementing any of the provisions in the amendment, until a new benchmark summer flounder assessment can be conducted. I would also recommend an independent review of the assessment methods, practices, and conclusions as was done by the National Academy in the year 2000. My concerns are:

1. As described in the draft amendment, overfishing over the last several years, along with below average stock recruitment (R) has resulted in a steady decline in the spawning stock biomass (SSB), that if not addressed with severe cutbacks in harvest, would result in the near certain crossing of the threshold reference proxy, resulting in a new mandatory rebuilding program. In my opinion the problems with this assessment are not with the fishery independent data (SSB and R), but with the conclusion that these declines are due primarily to overfishing, and that additional cutbacks will improve the situation.
2. Let's deal with the issue of overfishing first:
  - a. The estimates on the significant increases in recreational fishing effort for 2016, which then lead to a significant overestimate of the recreational catch, are not in line with reality. This issue is addressed in the congressional



- letter, and has been addressed in sufficiently in detail by Tom Fote of the JCAA in his editorials in the JCAA newsletter, so I will not repeat the details. If the fishing effort for 2016 was more in line with previous years, would the harvest numbers and the high value of fishing mortality (F) be the same? This should be further investigated.
- b. All reductions in SSB are not due to overfishing, in spite of the implied definitions in the stock assessment guidelines. A school of menhaden that swims into the Shark River, sucks out all the oxygen, and then dies, was not overfished. An extreme example for sure, but it is likely that the stock models have not accounted for increases in natural mortality (M). This is critical since an underestimation of M will lead to an overestimation of fishing mortality (F). Sources of potential natural mortality increases are well known, and include increased predation by other fish stocks, normal and climate-change induced changes in habitat temperatures, ocean acidification, habitat degradation, and declines in food sources for the stock. There is no indication that the SSC has sufficiently adjusted M when running the model. Rather it has concluded that there is no evidence to indicate that M has changed all that much. Anyone associated with the current state of our coastal estuaries or the situation with climate change induced changes in the ocean would find this hard to believe.
  - c. Total landings for summer flounder are now at near historic lows. In 2015 landings for summer flounder had a significant decline to 64% of the recreational harvest limit (RHL), probably due to weather related reductions in fishing effort. Yet there was no impact of this severe reduction in landings on SSB. Why would we expect that further reductions in 2017 in an already severely reduced level of landings would have any significant impact on SSB? Logic suggests that the decline in SSB seen in recent years is not primarily due to the fishing harvest, but to other factors, including increased natural mortality and reduced recruitment.
  - d. A sad part of this story is the amount of illegal fishing going on in this fishery. Unfortunately, the trends have been that noncompliance increases with the stringency of the bag and size limits. Do we see any evidence that this trend will get better by tightening up even more?
3. So, why are recruitment levels declining in this fishery, and perhaps others such as Atlantic Striped Bass? The SSC and the ASMFC offer no explanation, but let's examine a couple of possibilities:
    - a. It is possible of course that the reduced size of the SSB has led to reductions in R. Historically, however, R has been poorly correlated with SSB in this fishery, and much lower levels in SSB than currently seen have produced stellar Young of the Year (YOY) numbers. So, this is not a likely cause and effect scenario.
    - b. Currently, 95% of the recreational catch is composed of spawning size females. The conventional wisdom here is that removing so many large females from the SSB leads to a reduction of spawn, and thus an eventual reduction of R. Since 2011 when the decline in SSB and R became apparent, the high minimum size limits across the key states of New York and New Jersey have been cited as the main factor in causing the declines, because the size limits focused the entire recreational harvest on large females from this point on. On the surface this looks like a good argument, as less egg production would result in fewer juveniles. But, we must remember that for a fertilized egg to grow and mature into a member of the YOY class, it must make it to a coastal estuary and prosper in that environment.
    - c. So, are there indications that the numbers of summer flounder larvae entering our coastal estuaries has been reduced? Not really. I was as surprised to learn this as probably you are, but data indicate that the number of larvae successfully migrating from the coastal shelf breeding grounds and into the coastal nurseries

along the shore has not declined, and in fact have been quite good (personal communication, Ken Able, Rutgers Marine Research Station in Tuckerton). IF this is the case, then the only explanation for reduced YOY numbers (R) would be that fewer larvae are surviving their first summer to reach a large enough size to be caught in the nets used for the surveys. The factors that affect the size of the YOY class are numerous and varied, but again, if you are aware of the declining state of the coastal nurseries over the last couple of decades you should not be surprised that their carrying capacity for juvenile fish has been reduced. This is such an important factor in what's going on with summer flounder, and yet this has not been addressed at all in any of the discussions or documents I have heard or seen thus far.

- d. Whether you believe it's (b) or (c) above, do you think that increasing the size limit is going to have any positive impact? Maybe if you reduced all fishing to 0, but even there I'm not sure.

At the end of the day I believe we are looking at real numbers in the declining SSB and R, but with all the uncertainty as to the causes, it seems both unwise and unfair to single out recreational and commercial fishing as the sole culprit. As already pointed out, these harvests are already so low that to expect further reductions to be impactful seems at best misguided and not good science. It is also clear that the strategy taken on by the council and commission during the last five to ten years to repeatedly increase the minimum size limit, is not working. The prior rebuilding program worked, but the success of that program led to increased recreational and commercial harvests, and this in turn led to the counter-productive measures currently serving as the management program. (To paraphrase a well-worn work-saying, the beatings will continue until the stock numbers improve.) It's time to step back and re-assess the whole summer flounder fishery management process.

## Membership Report

By Kyren Dooley

Association membership dues are due on January 1, 2017 and invoices will be mailed to your club. Please complete all the information on the forms provided to you so that we can have accurate information about your club.

*Please note* that our JCAA address has changed! The JCAA has moved to a new location and the address is as follows:

**Jersey Coast Anglers Association  
Unit 13  
1594 Lakewood Road  
Toms River, NJ 08755**

If there are any problems with the JCAA sending newsletters to the wrong addresses or to the wrong club members, please let me know so that corrections can be made. I can be reached at (609) 713-7712 or at dools702@comcast.net.

## Salt Water Sportsman National Seminar Series Celebrates 30 Year Anniversary Tour with a Stop in Linwood!

The Salt Water Sportsman National Seminar Series will bring a stop on its 30 Year Anniversary Tour to the Linwood Country Club (500 Shore Road, Linwood) on Saturday, February 25. The host of the 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. presentation will be **George Poveromo** – of *George Poveromo's World of Saltwater Fishing* on the NBC Sports Network, and Contributing Editor for *Salt Water Sportsman*. **Nick Honachefsky**, a noted writer, author, TV personality and New Jersey fishing authority, will serve as co-host. The Tour is being presented by Bass Pro Shops.

Joining **Poveromo** and **Honachefsky** in Linwood will be:

- **Captain “Jersey” Justin Suarez** – Renowned Jersey City-based specialist at catching trophy striped bass, fluke, blackfish and sea bass, as well as dolphin, sharks and tunas with his *Jersey Justin Fishing Charters!*
- **Captain Trey Rhyne** - Veteran Avalon-based canyon and bluefin tuna fishing specialist with *Over-Under Sportfishing Charters!*
- **Gary Caputi** – Distinguished expert on fishing New Jersey’s near shore and offshore waters, author, and Field Editor for *Salt Water Sportsman!*
- **Captain Michael Yocco** – Innovative mid-Atlantic/Northeast offshore pro who specializes in rigging and trolling dead bait for tuna and billfish in the canyons and near shore bluefins, with his *MJ’s Sportfishing!*
- **Captain Alex Majewski** – Premier authority on fishing the flats and open waters of Barnegat Bay as well as its coastal waters for striped bass, fluke, bluefish and weakfish with his *Lighthouse Sportfishing!*
- **Mary Hinchcliffe** – Noted Cape May-based offshore fishing specialist, and authority on catching striped bass off southern New Jersey!
- **Captain Tom Ferrara** – Legendary Atlantic City-based wreck and bottom-fishing pro who excels at catching trophy blackfish, fluke and sea bass, with *TWrecks Charters!*
- **Captain Tom Daffin** – Veteran Cape May-based authority on catching trophy blackfish, fluke and sea bass, and noted offshore tuna pro with his *Fishin’ Fever Sportfishing!*
- **Captain David Wicker** – Acclaimed bottom fishing pro and specialist in using marine electronics to catch fish!

Courses for the February 25th presentation will focus on: Trophy stripers on ultra-light tackle; Live-lining for trophy stripers; Top trolling tactics for stripers; Chunking for bluefish; Bluefish on surface lures; Inshore wire-line techniques; Jetty tactics; How to catch more and bigger fluke; Targeting trophy fluke; Top southern tactics for jumbo fluke; Secrets of fishing the Cape May Rips; Trophy drum in Delaware Bay; Secrets of fishing Delaware Bay; Top tactics for big blackfish; Catching blackfish by the score; Jigging for blackfish; No-nonsense weakfish tactics; How and

where to locate weakfish; Variety fishing in and around inlets; How to locate and fish productive bottom (blackfish, sea bass, spot and fluke); Back-bay stripers; Can’t-miss tuna-trolling patterns; Chunking for tunas; Live-baiting for tunas; Advanced methods for bluefin and yellowfin tuna; Cutting edge lure-trolling tactics; Subsurface offshore trolling; Cutting edge spreader bar and dredge tactics; Secrets for catching more inshore tuna; Reading water temperature charts; Targeting trophy Makos; Basic and advanced sharking techniques; Offshore kite fishing for sharks and tuna; Specialized tactics that take more big-eye tuna; How to troll up more wahoo and white marlin!

**SUCH A DEAL!** - The Seminar Series kicks off at 9:00 a.m. and will conclude by 3:00 p.m. Long considered the best bargain in sportfishing, a Seminar Series ticket is only \$ 55.00.

The ticket price covers five hours of instruction from the best pros in the business, a *Brand New 30<sup>th</sup>* Anniversary course textbook, a one-year subscription or extension to *Salt Water Sportsman*, one Roffer's Ocean Fishing Forecast Analysis, bottle of OrPine Wash & Wax, bottle of Star tron fuel treatment, bottle of Star brite Xtreme Clean, bottle of Corrosion Block, a \$ 10.00 Bass Pro Shops discount card (off any purchase of \$ 75.00 or more), and chances to win thousands of dollars worth of door prizes! The Grand Prize at the conclusion of the Jersey seminar is a Florida Keys fishing trip! The Super Grand Prize, to be awarded two weeks after the conclusion of the 2017 series, is a new Mako Pro Skiff 17 cc!

**A ROCKING GOOD TIME!** - As an added bonus, attendees of the New Jersey seminar are entitled to attend the After Seminar Party at the Bass Pro Shops in Atlantic City. A special area will be set aside for the 5:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. party. Seminar attendees must show their Seminar Series name badge to gain entry, and are entitled to bring one additional guest regardless if they attended the seminar. Complimentary food, refreshments and live music will be provided. George Poveromo and several other faculty members will be present at the party.

**HOW TO REGISTER** – *Get your tickets now, as the New Jersey seminar sold out the last three years. To pay with Visa, MasterCard and American Express, call (800) 448-7360, or register on-line, visit: [www.nationalseminarseries.com](http://www.nationalseminarseries.com).*

# Youth Education Report

By Greg Kucharewski

## **BOATING EDUCATION AND RESCUE B.E.A.R.**

Since 2014 the JCAA Youth Education Committee has worked with and supported “Boating Education and Rescue,” coordinated by Mike and Debbie Bennett who are environmental and boating safety educators. Mike and Debbie are NJ State Certified Instructors, Certified Master Naturalist and NJ HOFNOD Certified Instructors and are a 501 (c) 3 organization. Over the years we partnered together on youth fishing and veteran “Play HOOK-e” workshops. The Bennetts are very generous towards our JCAA NJ HOFNOD youth programs and also help our veteran men and women reconnect to the outdoors.

Each month Mike and Debbie host youth fishing, water safety, environmental conservation, and junior boater’s workshops at Ocean County Park, Lakewood, NJ. They are dedicated instructors who teach school-age children and their families about protecting our environment and how to be safe on the water. Mike and Debbie also visit local schools and fishing clubs to present programs such as, “Reel Fun Fishing” that is linked to NJ HOFNOD, “Pollution/Solutions”, “Outdoor Adventures” that includes crabbing, archery, nature walks, and “Inky the Whale” a story about a baby pygmy sperm whale.

If your club or school is interested in learning more about B.E.A.R., “Reel Fishing”, environmental conservation, outdoor family fun, and boater safety “Suddenly In Command” we recommend you contact Mike and Debbie Bennett at: 732-492-4009 Website – [boatingeducationandrescue.org](http://boatingeducationandrescue.org) Email – [bear@boatingeducationandrescue.org](mailto:bear@boatingeducationandrescue.org).

## **NEWARK BAIT & FLY CASTING CLUB YOUTH FISHING SEMINAR**

Children and their families are welcome to come and enjoy a night of fun fishing activities and refreshments. Each year on the first Tuesday in March the Newark Bait and Fly Casting Club hosts a Kid's Fishing Seminar at the Kenilworth VFW in Kenilworth, NJ. The seminar is free for participants and their chaperones. Carl Bruger, Hudson River

Fisherman’s Association is the guest speaker and will provide a fun learning activity for attendees. Carl was the recipient of the 2016 Youth Education Award. As a former educator I am sure Carl will capture the audience attention with his experience and knowledge about fishing. Children can learn to cast and try to catch one of the special backyard bass fish and learn about different types of fishing, baits, fly tying, etc. The seminar is scheduled for 7:30 p.m., Tuesday, March 7, 2017 and it’s always a lot of fun for the youngsters.



## **NJ HOFNOD INSTRUCTOR TRAINING**

The next NJ HOFNOD Leader Training will be held April 28-30, 2017 at the Lighthouse Center in Waretown, NJ.

NJ HOFNOD is coordinated by Liz Jackson, HOFNOD Coordinator DEP Division of Fish & Wildlife. Please contact Liz to learn more about the benefits of becoming a NJ HOFNOD instructor. 908-637-4125 x122 or e-mail at [Liz.Jackson@dep.nj.gov](mailto:Liz.Jackson@dep.nj.gov).

## **PAUL SMITH JCAA YOUTH EDUCATION COMMITTEE MEMBER**

JCAA Youth Education Committee member Paul Smith is working with local high school student educators in Point Pleasant Beach and assisting them with the specialized craft of building a sailing duck boat. After students complete the design model and build the sailing duck boat, they will use it to compete during August 2017 at the Mantoloking Yacht Club Sailing Duck Boat competition.

Since 1963, Paul Smith has been a Master Craftsman Boat Builder at David Beaton & Sons in West Mantoloking, Brick, NJ. The high school advisors are lucky to have Paul as a mentor because when Paul started his career he learned how to build Duck boats, Sneakboxes, Comets, Penguins,



Lightnings, and Bluejays. This is a great learning experience in boat building for Point Pleasant Beach high school students. I'm sure they will use their new skills to build a winning vessel for the 2017 Mantoloking Yacht Club Sailing Duck Boat competition.

Last year, Paul Smith was recognized at the Barnegat Bay Sailing Hall of Fame. The Barnegat Bay Sailing Hall of Fame promotes and preserves the area's maritime heritage by recognizing individuals whose accomplishments on the water and/or on shore have significantly enhanced Barnegat Bay's maritime character and strengthened its status as a maritime center. They could not have chosen a better person to receive recognition for his tireless efforts of contributing to the sport and the protection of our aquatic resources.

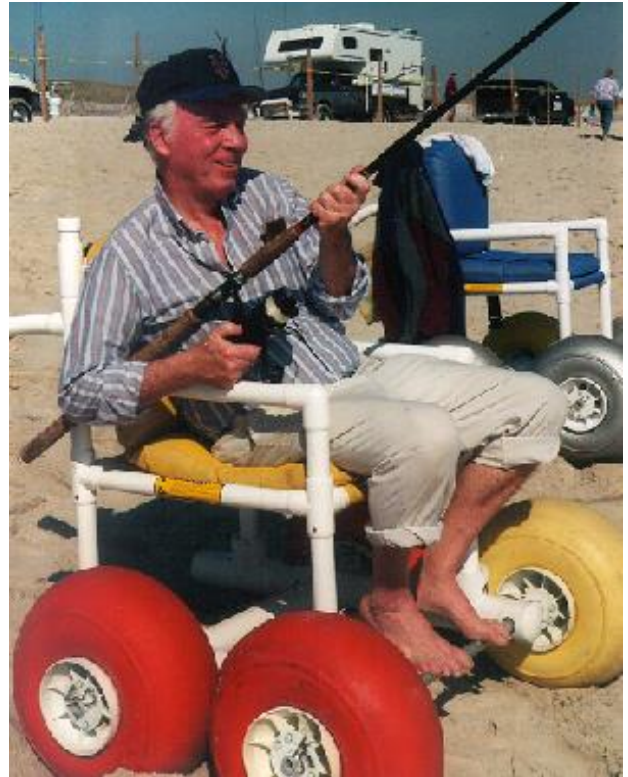
Paul is also a member of the Governor's Surf Fishing Tournament Committee and recently attended a GSFT meeting with Jim Freda and Eric Wasnesky - Manasquan High School Fishing Club, Jeremy Muermann and Terry Stuart - Lacey Township HS Fishing Club, Bob MacMaster - Toms River Southern Regional Fishing Club and other GSFT Committee members to discuss a high school fishing competition on Sunday, May 21, 2017 at Island Beach State Park during the GSFT. This is still in the development stage and we are fortunate to have dedicated educators to help create a fun surf fishing program for students. More high school fishing information will follow in the March JCAA Youth Education report.

### **ISLAND BEACH STATE PARK BEACH WHEELCHAIRS**

We are gearing up for the 26<sup>th</sup> Annual Governor's Surf Fishing Tournament and we would like to remind our physically challenged anglers that there is an area at OBA 1 with beach wheelchairs available. The JCAA Youth Education Committee is helping novice and physically challenged anglers at the Governor's Surf Fishing Tournament. This year the World Jeep Chrysler, Shrewsbury, NJ will assist physically challenged anglers with a NEW 4x4 VIP vehicle to transport anglers that will be fishing the reserved area in front of OBA 1. Team World Jeep Chrysler will also be available to answer questions about 4x4 maintenance and fluids.

Members of the Vietnam Veterans of America (Chapter 12) and volunteer anglers from various fishing clubs will also assist. Island Beach

wheelchairs are provided by: Governor's Surf Fishing Tournament Committee, New Jersey Beach Buggy Association, New Jersey State Federation of Sportsmen's Club, Jersey Coast Anglers Association, Jersey Shore Surfcasters, Greater Point Pleasant Charter Boat Association, John Mangiante Foundation, Manasquan River Marlin and Tuna Club, and Jersey Coast Shark Anglers. If you know a disabled veteran or angler that would like to fish the tournament, please phone Greg K at 732-785-9278 or email [vkucharews@jcaa.org](mailto:vkucharews@jcaa.org).



**Save the Date**  
**JCAA FLUKE  
TOURNAMENT**  
**August 5th, 2017**