

Northern Shrimp Advisory Panel Meeting Report #1

The Shrimp Advisory Panel met at the Casco Bay Ferry Terminal in Portland, Maine, on September 28, 2004. The Panel met to discuss the 2004 fishing season, 2003 assessment, and recommendations made at the Sea Grant workshops held last spring. The following is a summary of that meeting with recommendations to the Northern Shrimp Section.

Participants

John Seiders (AP member)
Terry Alexander (AP member)
George Lapointe (ME DMF Director, Section Chair)
Pat White (ME Gov. Apte., Section member)
Margaret Hunter (Shrimp Technical Committee Chair)
Edward Tho (Tenants Harbor, ME)
Roger Libby (Port Clyde, ME)
Maggie Raymond (S. Berwick, ME)
Sherm Hoyt (Sea Grant/UMaine Coop Extension)
Tim Eddy (Windham, ME)

Shrimp Stock Assessment and Summer Survey

The Technical Committee (TC) met September 15-16th to discuss the 2003 assessment and summer survey and the 2004 fishing season. There were a number of recommendations to improve the summer survey and annual assessment made by participants at the Sea Grant workshops (See ASMFC's "Northern Shrimp Management Workshops Results and Synthesis"). The TC explored many of these recommendations and will put together a proposal for expanding the number of sample sites within the current survey area and developing an inshore (within 50 fathoms) survey. The expanded survey within the historic survey area is being proposed to get a more data to make the assessment more accurate and reliable. The inshore survey is being proposed to test if shrimp are staying within 50 fathoms during the summer.

Funding for the summer survey has stayed at \$30K for the life of the survey. That amount is less than what is required to fulfill the current needs of the survey. The TC estimated that \$100K is needed to cover the expanded survey and inshore survey. The Advisory Panel (AP) meeting attendees discussed funding options. One suggestion was to build in industry participation into the proposal and send it to U.S. Congress for funding through appropriations. Another suggested funding source for the 2006 survey is the Northeast Consortium.

One suggestion from the workshops was to add an AP member to the TC to establish a formal link of communication between the committees. This issue will be discussed at the November 8th Section meeting.

Shrimp Management Process

Workshop participants suggested that neither the TC nor AP should make specific recommendations for the shrimp season. This suggestion was echoed at the AP meeting. A section member in attendance believed it is impractical for neither committee to make specific recommendations. The problem that occurred last year was the TC recommendation of a zero-day season got out to the press before the report was reviewed by the AP and Section. The Section Chair will work with the TC and AP on the best procedure for making recommendations to the Section.

Another suggestion from workshop participants was to set the season earlier than November each year. Landings reporting requirements allow state-permitted shrimp fishermen to submit their landings any time before December 31. The TC struggles with the tradeoff of having an earlier assessment with less data or a later assessment with more complete data. The Section would like to set the season earlier, but early to mid November seems to be the most appropriate time. AP meeting participants emphasized the recommendation from the workshop to forecast what the season may look like several years out. The industry would be better off even if the TC and Section could give some sort of forecast for the following season when the Section sets the current season. The Section Chair will discuss the possibility of this with the TC.

At the workshops there was a call for better communication and understanding between industry and Section members. This is a two-way street. Both groups are open to better communication. All Section and AP members' contact information is available on the ASMFC website (www.asmfc.org).

Amendment 13 Impacts on Shrimp Fishing

The passage of Amendment 13 opened up the 25600 line for April and May. However, it established a closed area/season to protect habitat. The closed area is a prime location for shrimp fishing. It is believed the NEFMC can make minor changes to provide major benefits to the shrimp fishery without sacrificing the goals of the closure. One option is to open up a small corner of the closed area to shrimp fishing. Another is to designate shrimp as a "low impact" fishery, which would allow some fishing. AP attendees request that the Section send a letter to NEFMC to support changes that would benefit the shrimp fishery. Attendees also asked that the Section be mindful of this closure when deciding the 2004-2005 season.

Amendment 1 Management Tools

Workshop participants most supported some form of limited or controlled entry. The details of how this would best be accomplished were not discussed much. The AP requested that a workshop be held soon to begin figuring out how best to use this tool. Maine put together a task force several years back to look at this specific issue. It did not carry through the state legislature but the report will provide useful background information for a workshop. The Section will discuss the necessity of a workshop at its next Section meeting.

AP members picked up on the conversation at the workshops concerning setting limits on individual effort. There was some support for setting trap and vessel size limits before a recovery in the fishery. One AP member suggested capping trap limits at no more than 225 traps. Another suggestion was to set vessel limits at the largest vessel currently fishing for shrimp.

The AP discussed the possibility of total allowable catch (TAC). However, it was determined that more accurate (i.e. daily or weekly) reporting was needed before a TAC could be used as a management tool.

The AP attendees liked the idea of a days-at-sea (DAS) program. Some said it would not work unless it was paired with a limited entry system, but this is not the case. One suggestion was to set the season window at 90 days and give each fisherman 60 days to fish within the window. A DAS program would require a call-in system. There were strong suggestions that the call-in system be developed independent of the current federal system.

2004-2005 Fishing Season

The AP at the time did not have specific recommendations for the upcoming season. It will be putting together those recommendations at its tentatively scheduled meeting on October 25th. The AP attendees did have general comments to the Section for the fishing season.

If the shrimp catch were more spread out, fishermen and processors would be better off. One suggestion was to open a modest fishery in mid-December. This would allow fishermen to take advantage of the holiday market. It may also help to establish a price for shrimp for the rest of the season. AP attendees believed a December fishery would be relatively small because of weather and a more valuable groundfish fishery for those with days left.

The idea of an incentive program for the use certain gear types, specifically a double-Nordmore grate, was discussed. One option was to give fisherman who used the double grate throughout the season extra days at the end of the season. Another option was to establish somewhat of an experimental fishery in December where you could only fish if you were using the double grate.

The AP attendees laid out three major considerations for the Section as they craft a season for 2004-2005. They recommended designing a season that would:

- 1) Take advantage of the 2001 year class
- 2) Address market issues
- 3) Take into consideration the habitat closure from Amendment 13 (mentioned above)