

**Striped Bass AP Conference Call**  
**Monday March 14, 2011**

**AP Members Present:** David Pecci (ME), Chip Gray (ME), Peter Whelan (NH), Chuck Cassela (MA), Ed Cook (RI), Fred Frillici (CT), Arnold Leo (NY), Al Ristori (NJ), Lou Bassano (NJ), Dave Sikorski (MD), Ed O'Brien (MD), Joe Fletcher (DC), Kelly Place – Chair (VA), Bob Fjelstad (VA)

**Staff Present:** Kate Taylor

**TC Members Present:** Vic Crecco (CT), Charlton Godwin (NC), Wilson Laney - TC Chair (USFWS), and Alexei Sharov - TC Vice-Chair (MD)

The AP met on Monday March 14th at 2:30 pm. During the call the AP reviewed the CT conservation equivalency proposal and discussed the recent MD poaching incidents and NC discarding events. The CT request was for the transfer of the annual commercial quota of 23,750 pounds to a bonus recreational fishery. The bonus recreational fishery would allow the harvest of 4,025 striped bass (sizes 22 -27.9 inches) in the CT river (based on an average weight of 5.9 pounds for fish between 22” and 28”) . It is estimated that the striped bass population in the CT River, size 22-28", is approximately 165,000 fish, so the exploitation rate will be 2.4%. Monitoring will be conducted through a tag system. Any striped bass size 22 - 27.9" must be accompanied by a tag. Tags will be mailed back to Marine Fisheries with information on the size of the fish caught as well as the date. The tags will be distributed to Riverfront Riverkeepers as part of a program to promote fishing activities to disadvantaged kids. While the program has been mainly developed as an outreach initiative, it may also provide marginal predator control to help rebuild blueback herring stocks. Vic Crecco noted that the program is more outreach, for disadvantaged children, mainly Latino and African American, than it is for predator control. He noted that they have had an alarming drop in license sales, so this is designed primarily to recruit more anglers. He noted that it will be questionable whether they will even have the skills to catch the fish. This program will not replace the current 2 fish / 28" recreational fishery regulations. It is not expected that the entire quota will be harvested.

All AP members were in support of the outreach component of the proposed program. Kelly Place had concerns about the discard mortality and potential highgrading due to a narrow slot limit of just six inches. He asked if a 5.9 pound stiped bass could eat that many blueback herring or shad. Arnold noted that a recent proposal to increase the commercial quota by a modest amount was opposed by CT, yet now they were requesting to increase fishing pressure. It was noted that CT is entitled to use their commercial allocation how they want and Fred and Peter brought up that NJ has had a similar program in place for many years. Arnold said the point was that it would increase mortality which he thought the recreational community was expressly against. Vic said that in CT the mortality increase would be pretty small, only 3 to 4 percent.

Peter noted that the proposal did not include any information about disadvantaged kids and should include that when presented to the Board. Kelly stated that monitoring should be conducted on the program and wanted to know how many children had signed up to go fishing and how many mentors the program had to take the kids fishing. Lou suggested that the cards be restricted to disadvantaged children. Fred stated the cards won't go anywhere, other than where they are supposed to go. Several AP members noted the desirability of kid's fishing programs, especially for disadvantaged children.

Lou made a motion to amend the proposal to require a review of the program after one year. The motion passed (11-2- 1 abs). The AP approved recommending approval of the proposal to the Board, as amended, 11-2 (1 abs).

Charlton Godwin discussed the two striped bass discarding events that occurred off the coast of North Carolina. The first occurred on January 20th when one trawler, who normally doesn't participate in the fishery, caught an estimated 3-4,000 striped bass. The fish could not be pulled on board so the net was dumped. It is believed that the majority of the discarded fish were picked up by recreational and commercial fishers in the area who had not yet met their daily quota. The fishery closed that day, as had been previously scheduled. The second incident occurred on Feb 3rd when the fishery was reopened. DMF received calls of discarded fish and sent a marine aircraft to fly over the area for about 2 hours. An estimated 250 fish were counted floating on the water. Of ~75 fish that washed up at Pea Island NWR, 24 were undersized. The fishery was reopened yesterday through today. In order to prevent similar incidents, DMF raised the daily quota from 50 fish to 2,000 pounds, allowed transfer of fish to other permit holders and limited tow time to 30 minutes.

Kelly suggested consideration of a change to hook and line gear in the commercial fishery. It was stated that this situation in NC has to be dealt with, since this had occurred year-after-year. We have to eliminate unconscionable waste. Kelly asked if the 30 minute tow time would be in effect next year and Charlton said it was a common regulation in the past but he did not know if it would remain in effect for next year. Arnold noted that in NY there is a 21 fish per day trip limit for trawlers (who otherwise get the regular 240 tags for the annual season). Wilson noted that for Law Enforcement agents it is easier to enforce a limit based on numbers of fish rather than in pounds. Arnold stated that the discard mortality from the recreational fishery alone exceeds the entire commercial catch and that if we are worried that we are harvesting too many striped bass, then we might consider closing the recreational fishery in October and November.

Alexei Sharov discussed the recent striped bass poaching events in MD. Over the last month, MD natural resources police officers recovered 12.5 tons of striped bass in eight separate events. The fishery was shut down on February 4th over concerns the state would exceed its monthly quota. The fishery was reopened for today and Monday after it was estimated that 200,000 pounds of the quota still remained.

Kelly asked if there was other poaching that went undetected. Ed responded that there probably was, but that LE officials are looking for other nets and there will be in-depth analysis of nets, and of commercial and recreational participation in the fishery. Ed also stated the Marine Police went out in bad weather in response to tips from other commercial fishermen. Alexei noted that such issues are present in every region and that just because nothing has been uncovered, doesn't mean it doesn't exist, just that they have no knowledge of it.

Discussion ensued on various negative effects of poaching, where it is happening and what to do about it, especially in the EEZ off VA & NC during Wave 1. The general consensus was that the penalties for any poaching should be severe. Ed noted that good law enforcement often requires good law enforcement and is time consuming and expensive. Also, that most recreational and commercial fishermen have good ethics.

There was additional discussion on discard mortality and Kelly made a request to have the TC develop a report on discard rates and have the TC rank by gear the estimates they are most confident in. Wilson believed this would be possible. Alexei felt it would be beneficial for the TC to review how confident we are, in different estimates. We can point out where we need improvements. Kelly stated anything the TC could put together, to explain to stakeholders how it is done, would be useful to dispel misinformation.

Lou requested Kelly bring up at the Board meeting that he felt the Board should take the AP seriously, rather than going off in their own direction, especially considering the AP is very active and engaged. He was also concerned about transparency and that the Board members should not make separate deals or have quid pro quos with each other.

The Meeting was adjourned at 4:55 p.m.