

**RI Marine Fisheries Council
Tautog Advisory Panel
Meeting Minutes
February 16, 2011 - 7:00 PM
URI Bay Campus, Coastal Institute, Hazard Room, Narragansett**

R. Hittinger, Chair	F. Blount ^A
M. Bucko*	G. Oakley*
E. Cook *	C. Donilon
M. Ambrosia	J. Carvalho
P. Hearvy	C. Parkins
G. Allen	E. Gotovich
M. Lanni*	B. White
C. Breakell	R. Chatowsky
L. Shau	D. Birmingham
C. Chu	
S. Moreschi	Jason McNamee, RIDFW

(*primary advisory panel member; ^A alternate member)

R. Hittinger began the meeting. He stated that J. McNamee from the Division of Fish and Wildlife (Division or DFW) had a presentation (see attached) which covered the first 4 agenda topics. He went on to state that after the presentation the panel would move on to discuss any proposals they may have for either commercial or recreational tautog management in 2011.

J. McNamee began his presentation with a review of the 2010 commercial fishery. The fishery had a minor overage in the spring sub period and was the smallest overage seen in recent history. He stated that dealer reporting seemed to be improving, certainly in the tautog fishery. The summer sub period catch rates were relatively high but slowed down and did not close prematurely. The fall fishery was on par with recent history and for the year, only a very small overage was incurred. He concluded with a slide showing that the commercial fishery only represents about 9% of the total state tautog harvest. J. McNamee stated that the DFW was not proposing any changes to the commercial fishery with the one caveat that if it was preferred to enact a complete spawning closure, the closure would be enacted for all tautog fishing, not just recreational. J. Carvalho stated that it was an inequity for people who depend on commercial fishing to provide them access to the fish are unable to purchase a locally caught tautog for the majority of the year. He felt it was mismanagement of the resource to allow recreational fishermen access to the tautog resource to the disadvantage of RI residents, who can not purchase a tautog for most of the year. He wondered if the state had a plan to make the fishery more equitable. R. Hittinger requested that J. McNamee continue with the presentation and that J. Carvalho reintroduce the question during a later agenda item. J. Carvalho agreed but added that short openings and frequent closings are not a good marketing strategy and occur to the disadvantage of fishermen and the state.

J. McNamee went on to discuss recreational fishery performance in 2010. He gave some perspective on the fishery by breaking the data down to wave specific and mode specific data. The summary of this information is that the large harvest spikes are occurring in the later waves, 5 and 6, and that the majority of the landings (80%) are occurring in the private/rental boat mode. Harvest in 2010 went up relative to 2008 and 2009. However, due to the two previous year's decreased harvest and increases in fishery independent indices, the regional virtual population analysis (VPA) assessment indicated that the F rate in the region had decreased as of the terminal year 2009. J. McNamee also showed the panel information from a RI only biomass dynamic model (BDM) that had been developed by M. Gibson, which also indicated a similar trend, but had the advantage of a terminal year of 2010, where the BDM indicated deteriorating stock status. He also showed info from the Narragansett Bay Seine Survey, which indicated poor recruitment for the past several years.

J. McNamee finished by indicating that the DFW was proposing a season starting May 1 through May 31 at 3 fish, July 1 through October 15 at 3 fish, and then October 16 through December 15 at 6 fish and to maintain the 10 fish vessel limit for everyone but party and charter modes. He also gave an alternate proposal for a complete spawning closure that meant the season would start August 1 and go until October 15 at 3 fish and then October 16 through December 15 at 6 fish.

R. Hittinger asked if there were any comments, questions, or alternate proposals from the meeting participants to change tautog management in the recreational fishery in 2011. F. Blount stated that the shore mode had a very high PSE in the MRFSS estimate so he was leery of that information, stating that he thought it should be higher. He went on to state that the wave 5 data was anomalously high relative to the time series, so that was suspect as well. He concluded by stating that there was a high percentage of fish being harvested in RI state waters that were being landed out of state and therefore not being accounted for as RI harvested fish. He felt that spring needed better monitoring by both enforcement and data collection personnel.

J. Carvalho stated that he thought area closures would be a better alternative than seasonal closures. He felt area closures could be more effective in both a management and a biological sense. The question of peak spawning came up. J. McNamee stated that the Division had conducted an analysis a few years back. The conclusions of the analysis were that the seasonal peak spawning occurred from around June 15 through July 15th on average and it also concluded that the further down bay you moved the potential spawning closure (based on ichthyoplankton survey data), the more potential spawners would be protected.

There was some discussion on the efficacy of the vessel limit based on a question from G. Allen. J. McNamee stated that he had not gotten in to that analysis yet in detail, but in a general sense it did not appear to have much effect as harvest went up in 2010. Whether harvest would have been even higher had it not been for the vessel limit was not a conclusion he could make at this point. F. Blount stated that he thought it did have some

effect, mainly in wave 6, as harvest in wave 6 was lower than in wave 5 and he thought this was when the vessel limit regulation went in to effect.

G. Oakley posed a question to M. Bucko as the tackle shop representative. He asked whether he had heard from people asking for a higher vessel limit. M. Bucko stated that he had not heard that request specifically. G. Oakley went on to state that he had heard people question why the vessel limit was 10 fish and not 12 fish which would result in an equal number of fish based on the per person bag limit. He would support raising the boat limit to 12 fish.

G. Allen stated that he was opposed to opening on May 1, he felt it should remain April 15 to allow the small shore fishery that exists in the early spring to continue. He went on to state that he agreed with the proposal presented by the Division but thought the start date should be April 15 and that the vessel limit should be removed. F. Blount stated that the proposal made by G. Allen would increase harvest; it was more liberalized than what currently existed and he thought the Division was indicating that things should be more restrictive due to projected poor stock status. He thought that perhaps they could support the alternative option but instead of a closure make it a 1 fish bag limit during that period.

M. Ambrosia stated that he thought the DFW should analyze whether dropping the bag limit for party and charter from 8 to 6 would be a meaningful decrease. He felt this would not result in much harvest savings but the higher bag limit is an important marketing tool for the party and charter modes.

M. Lanni stated that he fishes in the Spring and taking May away would have a devastating impact to that fishery. He continued by stating that tautog was the only thing to fish for in the spring and it was a very traditional fishery for a segment of the RI population. He concluded that the harvest reductions gained from closing the spring would not be meaningful as there is not a high level of fishing going on at that time and further, most conscientious fishermen do not keep pregnant females, they release them. He supported status quo but said he would not be opposed to a slightly later start date.

G. Oakley suggested extending the existing June closure in to July 15 to get the closure over the bulk of the spawning period. Referencing G. Oakley's proposal, M. Bucko stated that the spring tautog fishery was a critical one for the tackle shops as it is the only fishery during that period. A spring closure would have severe impacts on the tackle shops and the spring fishermen. He put forward a proposal of April 1 through May 31 at 1 fish, having the existing closure go from June 1 through July 31 (analogous to G. Oakley's proposal), then an August 1 through October 15 season at 3 fish, and finally from October 16 through December 15 at 6 fish. He would increase the vessel limit to 12 fish and not have a vessel limit apply to the party and charter modes. E. Cook seconded M. Bucko's proposal. After some discussion regarding the 1 fish limit being analogous to a closure, M. Bucko modified his proposal to be 3 fish instead of one during the early spring season.

E. Cook made a comment that no one knew about the boat limit and they should consider getting rid of it all together. F. Blount stated that this would lead to liberalization in the fall, which was where the problem currently existed, and he would be opposed to it.

One of the panel participants commented that the April 1 start would open before the commercial fishery. J. McNamee indicated that this was true and may be problematic. The panel participant went on to state that he questioned the results of the assessment due to the type of gear used for the fishery independent indices, namely that trawl gear was not appropriate to assess tautog.

M. Bucko modified his proposal again. The following is the modified final proposal:

April 15 through May 31 at 3 fish

Closure from June 1 through July 31

August 1 through October 15 at 3 fish

October 16 through December 15 at 6 fish

Increase the vessel limit to 12 fish and not have a vessel limit apply to the party and charter modes.

E. Cook agreed with these modifications as the second to the original proposal. The panel voted unanimously to approve this option as a consensus from the panel.

J. Carvalho commented that if a recreational fisherman could go and get 3 fish and go home, there was an inequity because those without access to the fishery could not avail themselves of the same privilege as the commercial fisherman (as the person who provided access to those who do not have access otherwise) was denied access for large periods of time during the season. He stated that the fish ought to be made available to all consumers equally. He went on to state that the reverse occurs for other fisheries where the commercial fishery has greater access, but the same concept should hold there as well. The panel did not take any action on this proposal (attached).

F. Blount stated that he did not object to the proposals put forward by the Division and he thought the panel should take some action to let the Council and Director know their recommendations on those proposals as well. **F. Blount made the motion that he was not opposed to the two proposals submitted by the Division with a modification to a 12 fish vessel limit for everyone but party and charter. G. Oakley seconded this motion. The panel voted 3 to support the motion, 1 opposed to the motion, and 1 abstained.**

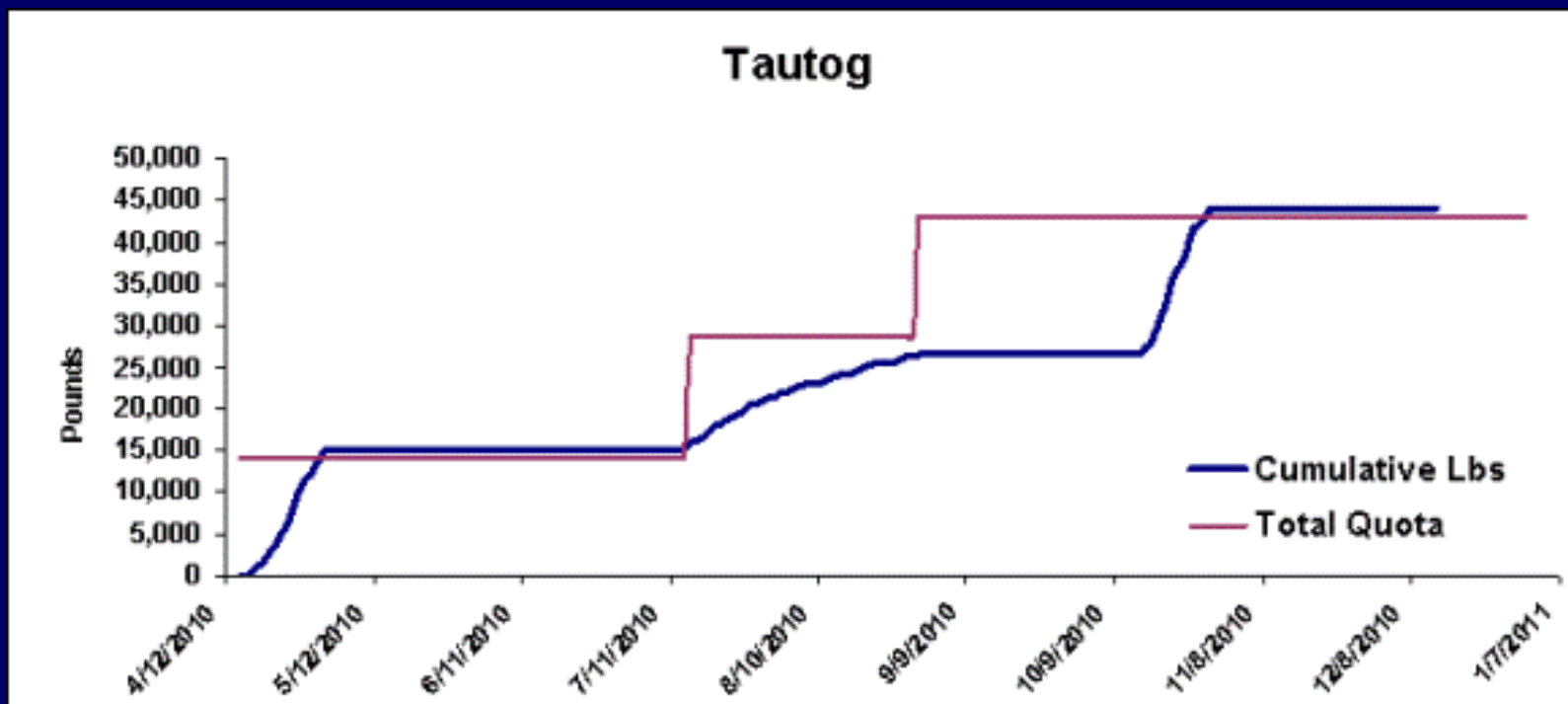
R. Hittinger adjourned the meeting.

Summary of Rhode Island Commercial Tautog Fishery

2010



Commercial Landings



- ◆ Overage of 1,106 lbs, smallest overage in past 10 years

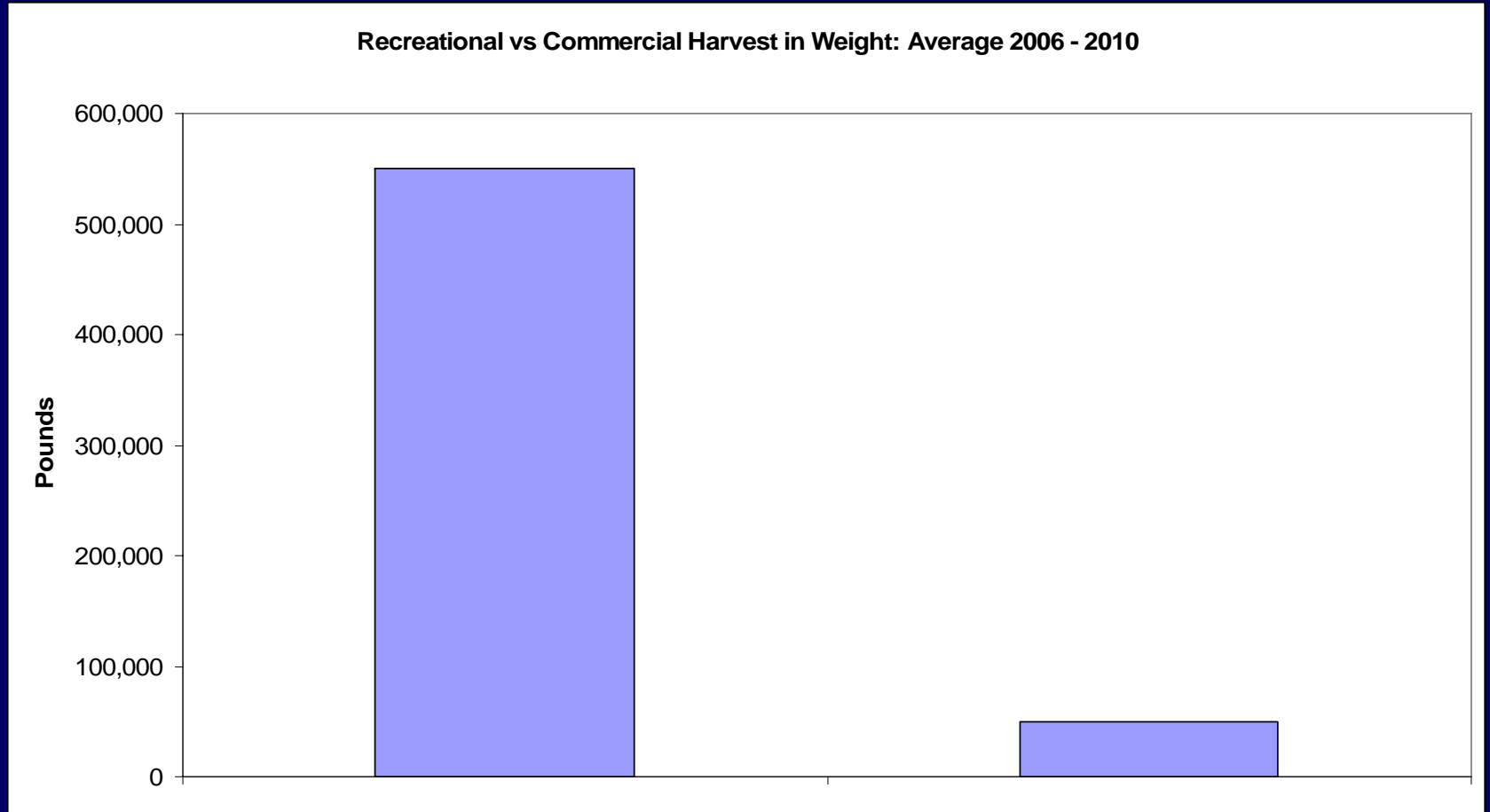


Commercial Quota

Period	Period Allocation	Quota Allocation
Year 2011		51,348 lbs – 1,106 lbs = 50,242 lbs
Apr 15 – May 31	33.3%	16,747 lbs
Jul 15 – Aug 29	33.3%	16,747 lbs
Oct 15 – Dec 31	33.3%	16,748 lbs
		50,242 lbs



Commercial Proportion of the Harvest



• Commercial represents 9% of Recreational Harvest



Division of Fish and Wildlife Proposed Changes

- ♦ The RI Division of Fish and Wildlife proposes no changes to the commercial fishery in 2011 as commercial landings are constrained by a quota, and further only represents approximately 9% of the total state harvest of tautog
- ♦ One caveat to this would be if it is preferred and recommended to do a spawning closure, the Division would recommend that the closure be for all fishing on tautog, commercial and recreational.



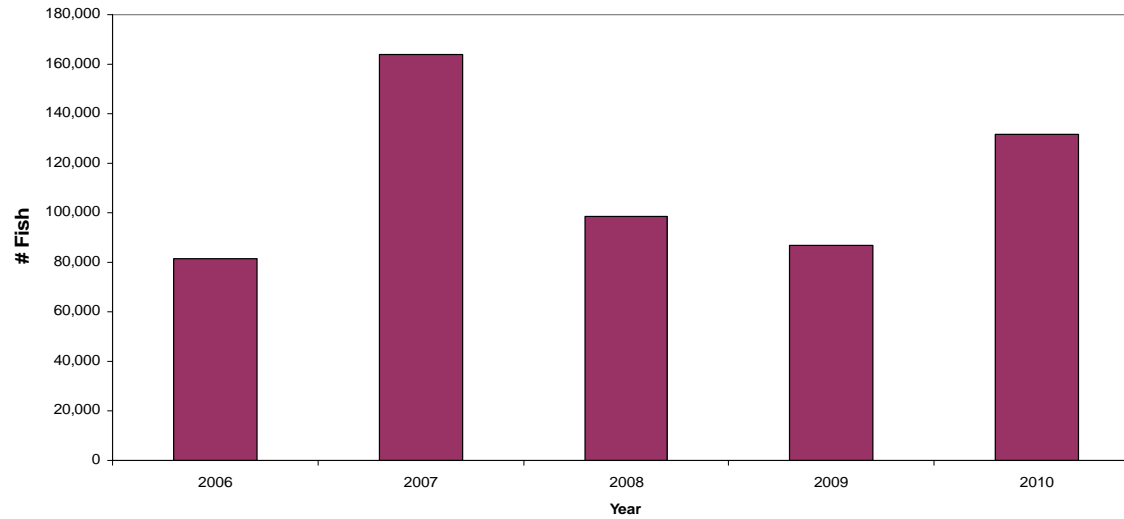
Summary of Rhode Island Recreational Tautog Fishery

2010

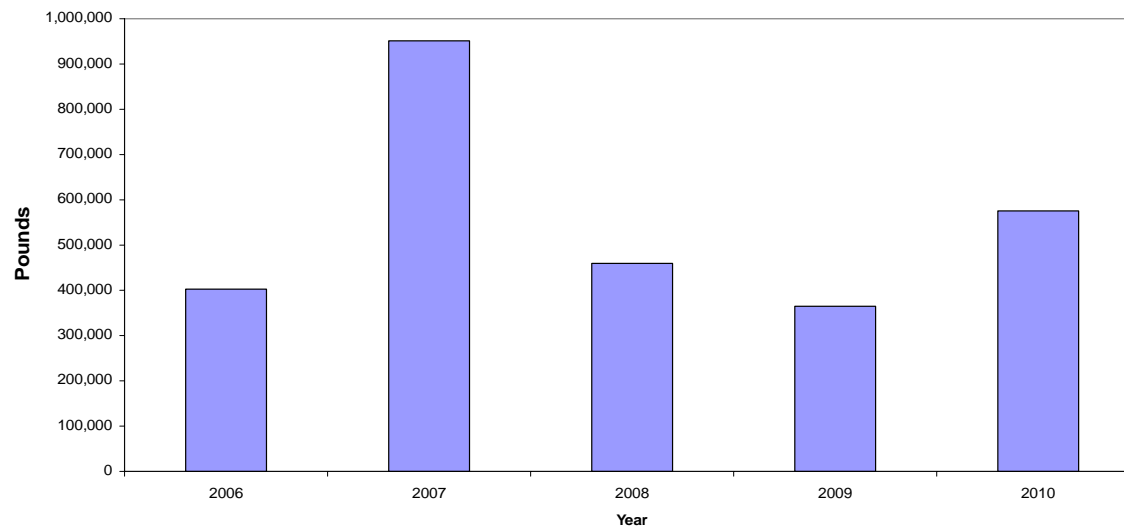


Recreational Landings

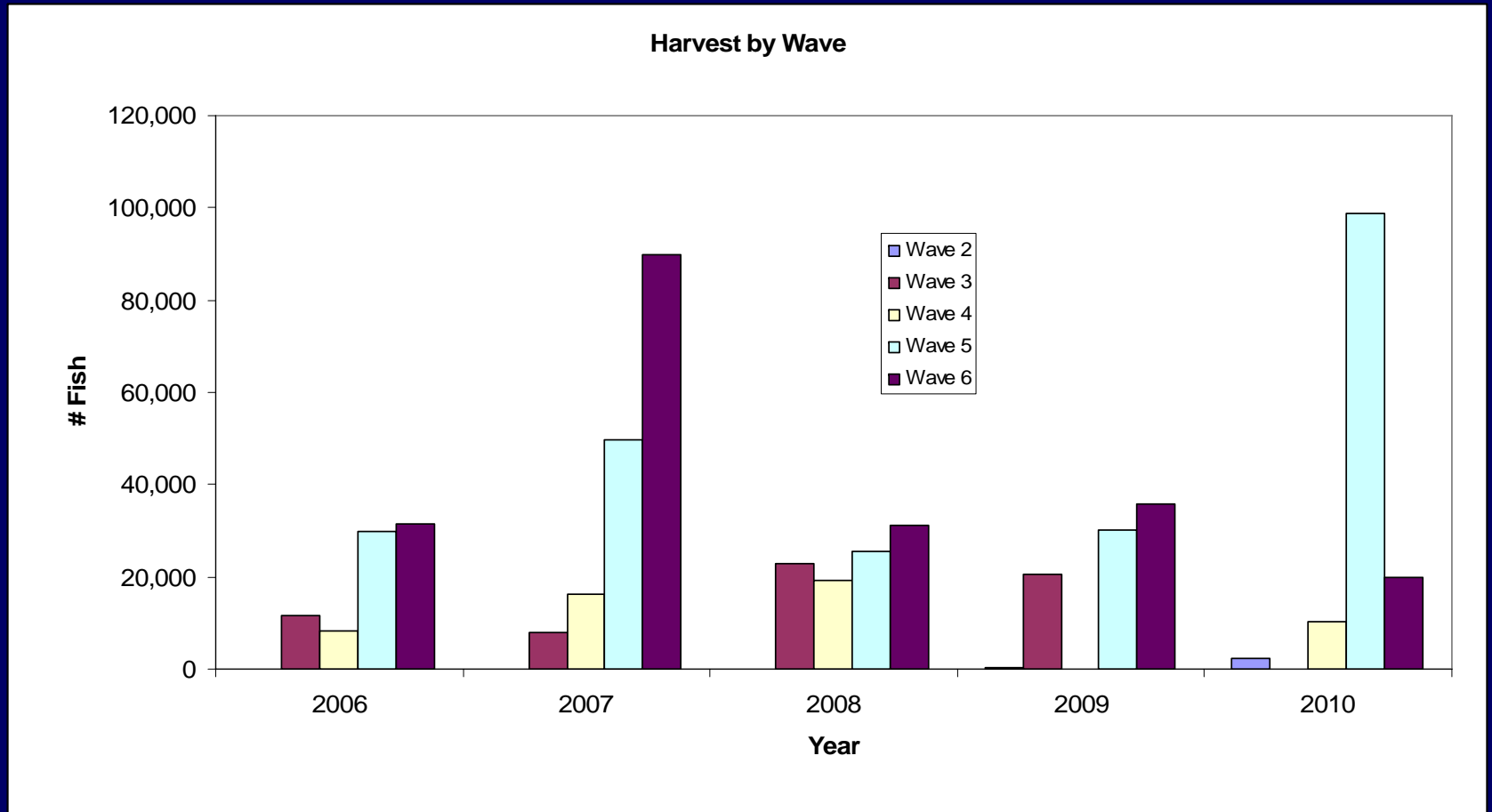
RI Tautog Harvest (A+B1)



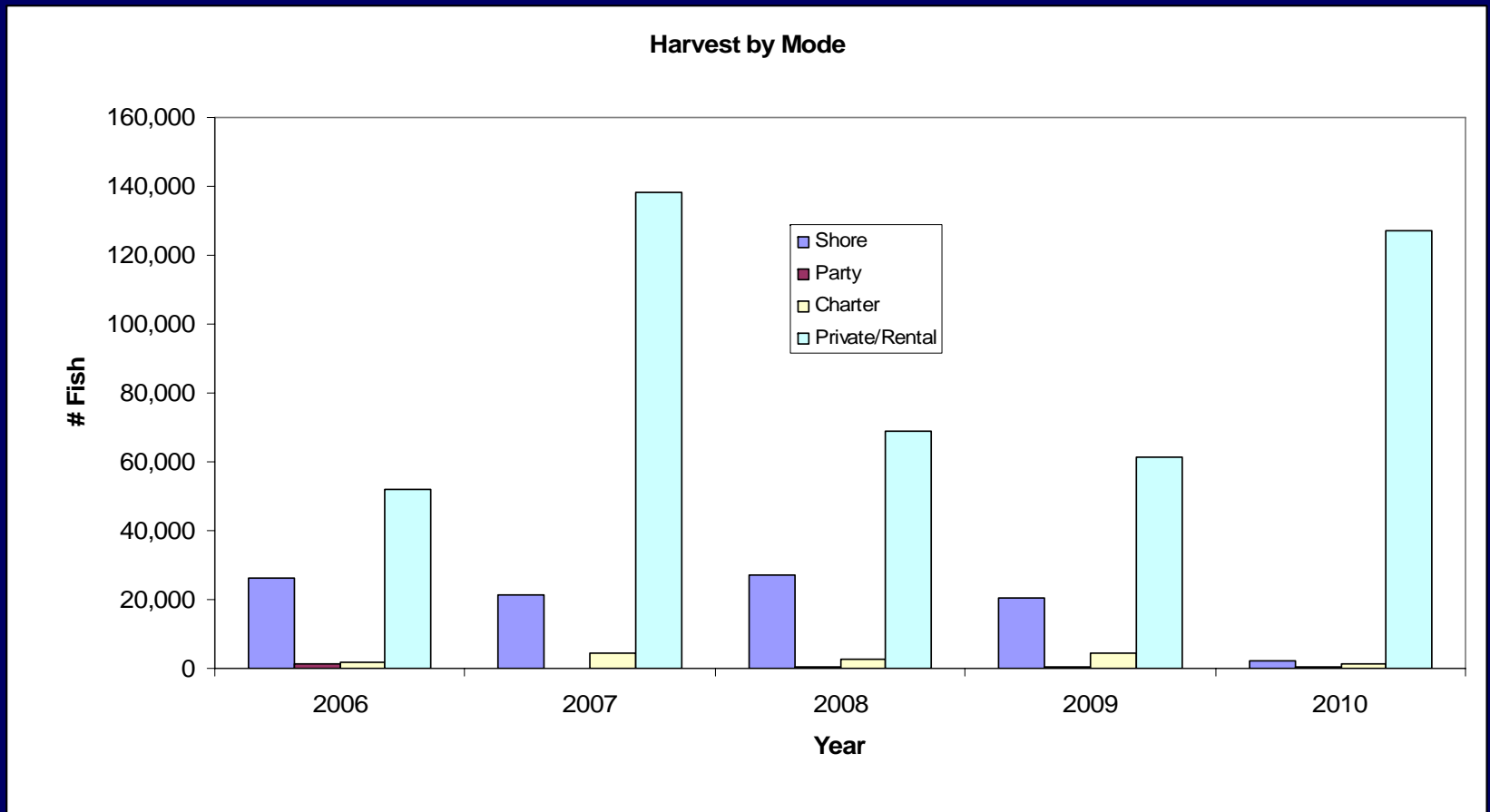
RI Tautog Harvest (A+B1)



Recreational Landings – Harvest by Waves



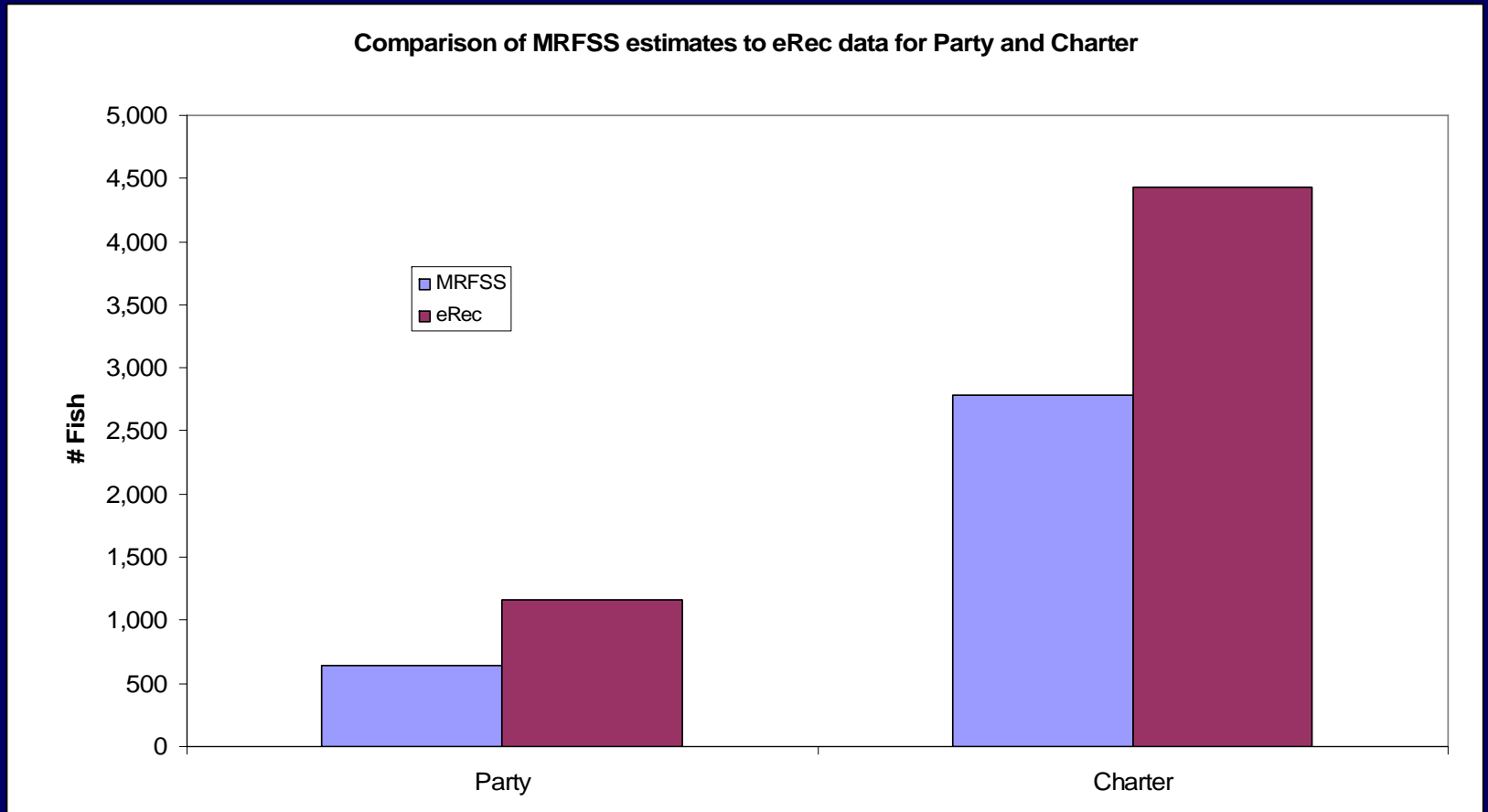
Recreational Landings – Harvest by Mode



•Average 2006 – 2010:

- Shore Mode represents 17%
- Party/Charter Modes (combined) represent 3%
- Private/Rental Mode represents 80%

Recreational Landings – Harvest Comparison: MRFSS to eRec data



• When using the eRec data, the proportion for Party and Charter Increases to 6%

ASMFC Addendum 6 to the Fishery Management Plan for Tautog and Coastwide Assessment Update

- Addendum 4 implemented a biomass target to assess whether the stock is overfished. The targets are: SSB target of 26,800 metric tons and a SSB threshold of 20,100 metric tons.
- States were required to reduce exploitation rate by 25.6%, based on the coastwide assessment and a new target $F=0.20$.
 - The technical committee originally recommended an F_{target} of $F=0.15$, however the management board, based on a number of projections produced by the TC, implemented $F=0.20$
- Addendum 5 approved August 15, 2007 and made some minor changes to Addendum 4:
 - State can reduce both rec and comm
 - Reductions to be measured as exploitation rather than F
- The Board continued to express its concern about poaching issue and committed to closely monitor enforcement efforts on the tautog fishery.
- Addendum 6 addresses poaching issues with options to prevent poaching. It also addresses apparent overharvest in state fisheries.
- Coastwide assessment went from benchmark assessment to an update. Will be completed for ASMFC March board meeting. Board may wish to withdraw overfishing elements of addendum and wait for assessment, unclear at this point.

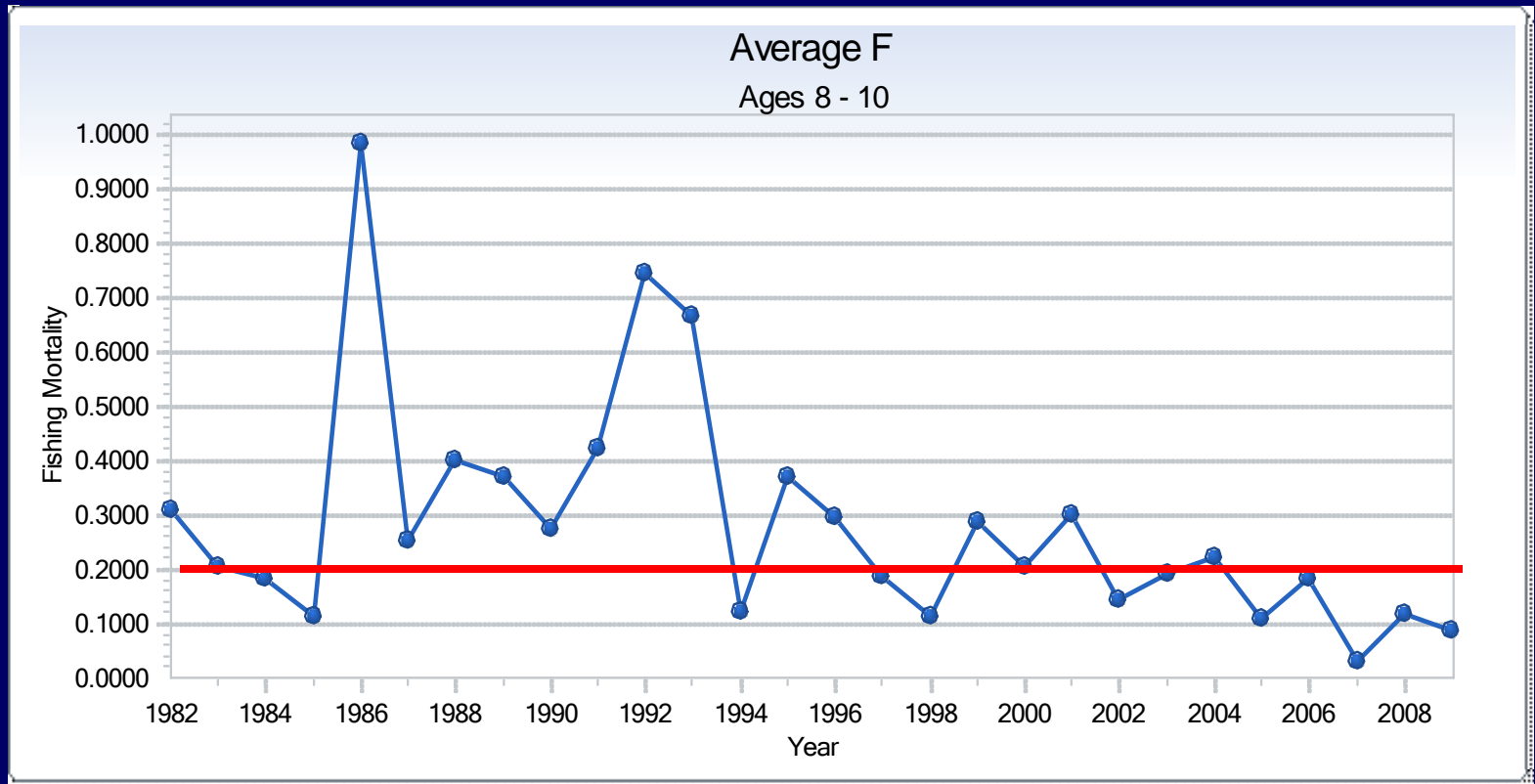


RI/MA Regional Stock Assessment Update

- States had the opportunity to submit state or region specific assessments for approval by the ASMFC tautog technical committee.
- RI and MA submitted a joint VPA showing an $F = 0.11$ for terminal year 2006, requested taking a 12% reduction rather than coastwide reduction. Joint VPA approved on October 30, 2007
- Regional stock assessment was updated in February 2011
- A combined assessment was conducted using MA + RI data, giving a regional F of approximately 0.10 for terminal year 2009, dropping substantially from the F estimate of 0.36 for terminal year 2008
- The retrospective pattern in F is that the terminal year increases in each subsequent year (i.e. F_{2007} was 0.22 and increased to $F_{2007} = 0.24$), however this did not occur in the latest run
- If the pattern does hold, this will result in a higher estimate for 2009
- The regional tautog stock assessment indicates that overfishing is not occurring and that rebuilding is occurring, though slowly.



RI/MA Regional Stock Assessment Update

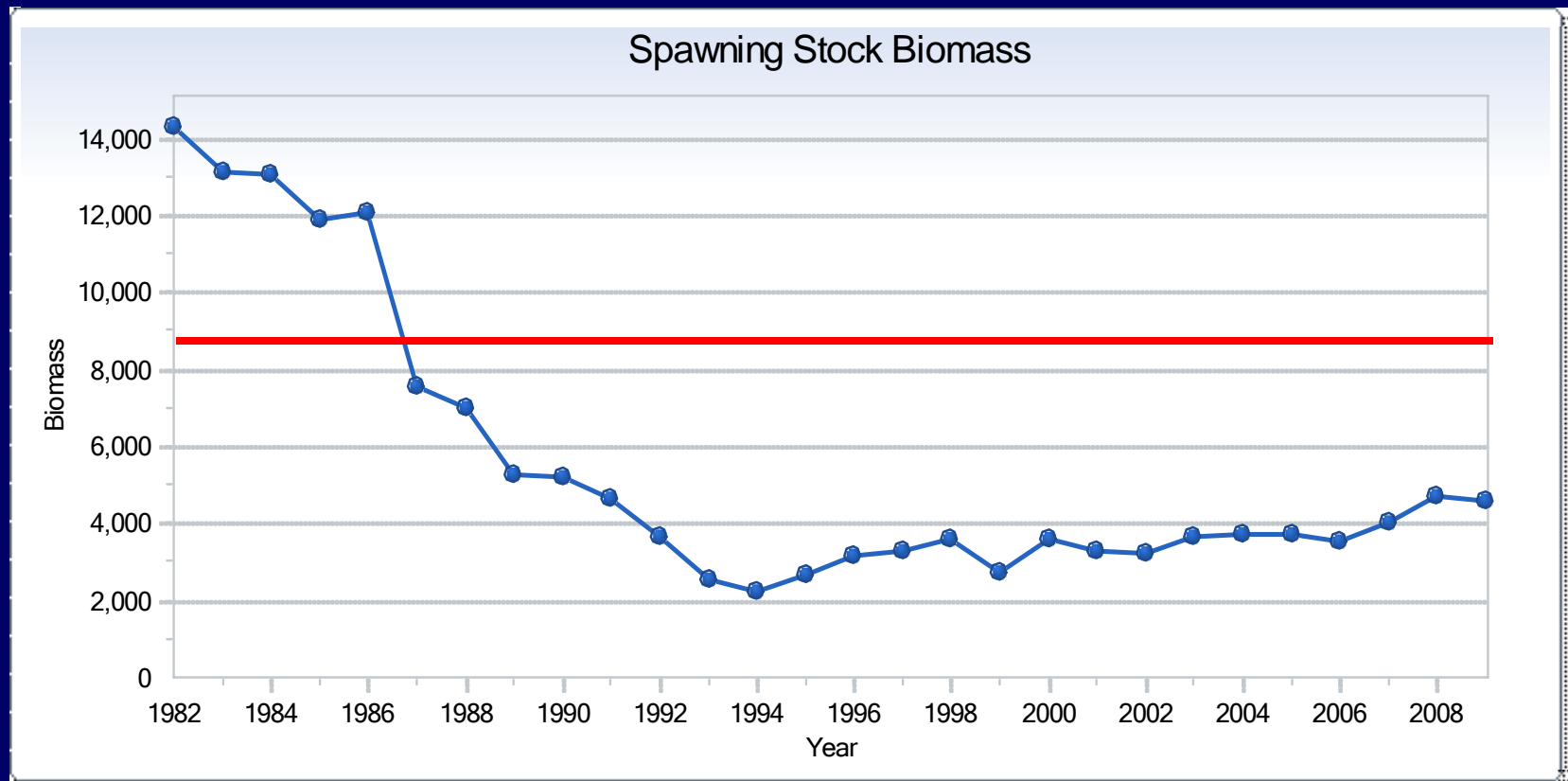


RI/MA Regional Stock Assessment Update

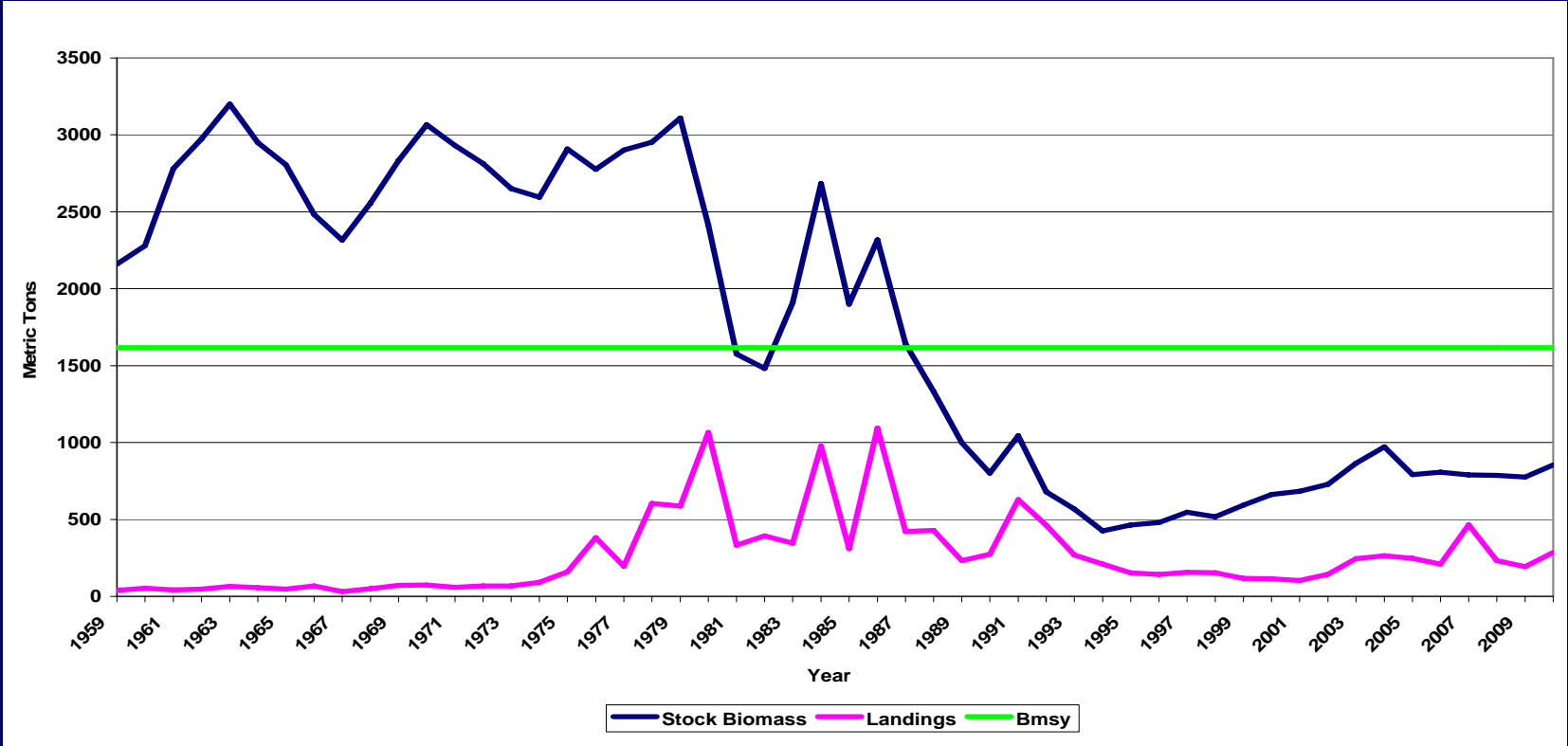
- **SSB grew from 2006 to 2008, but flattened out in 2009, deflating what looked like a positive trend in SSB.**
- **An interesting note is that the years of increasing SSB corresponded to years with $F < 0.15$. This element is also being addressed through Addendum 6 with comments being taken on dropping the F reference point back to 0.15, which had been supported by the TC in the past.**
- **If actions aren't taken, the stock will remain in an overfished state for an extended period of time**
- **RI/MA tautog stock was in an overfished state as of terminal year 2009, and has been since 1986.**
- **While stock status seems to have improved relative to last year's update, due to increased harvest in 2010, it is safe to assume that stock status will most likely decline to some degree when updated for 2010.**



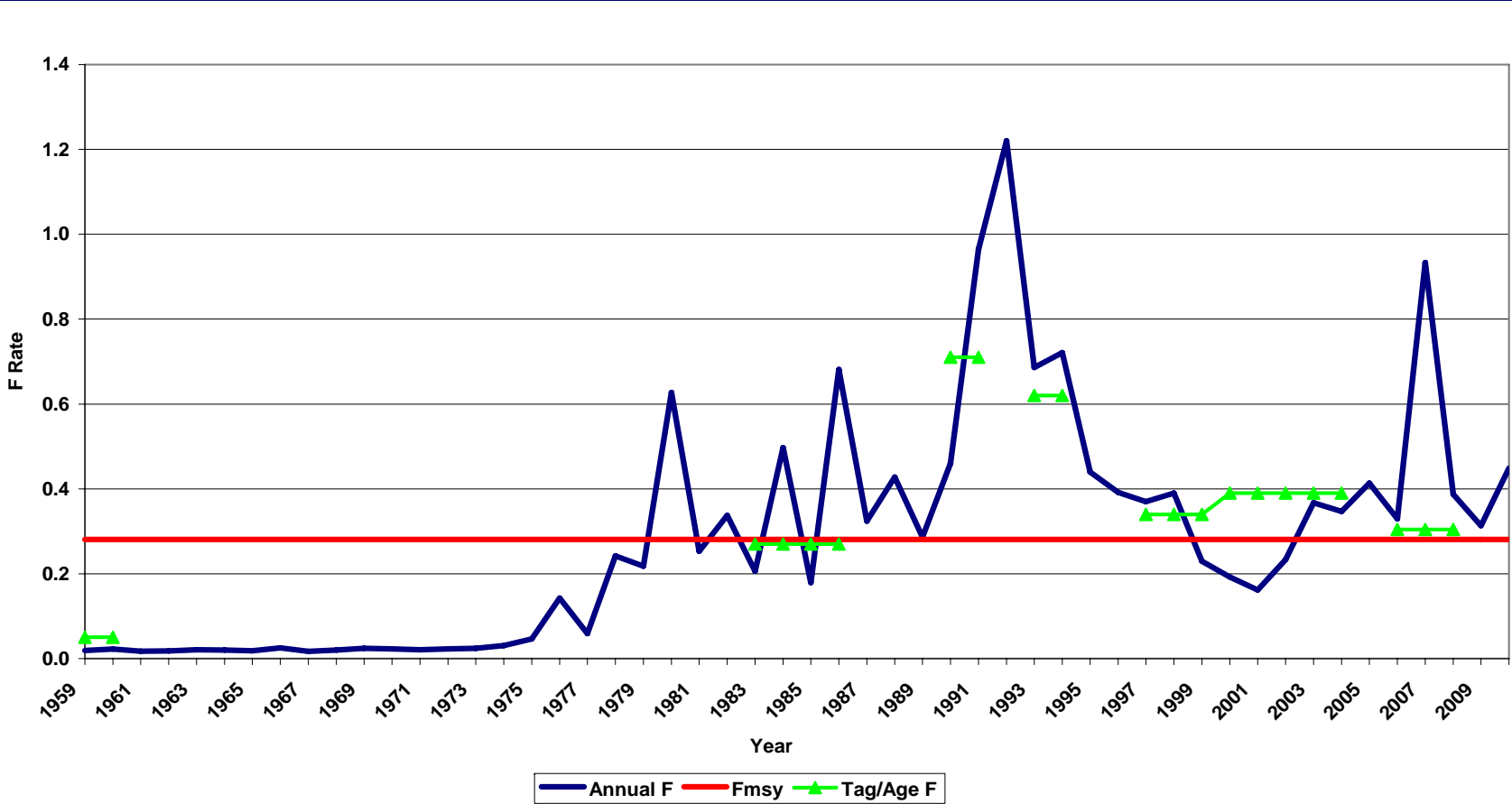
RI/MA Regional Stock Assessment Update



RI/MA Regional Stock Status – Additional Info

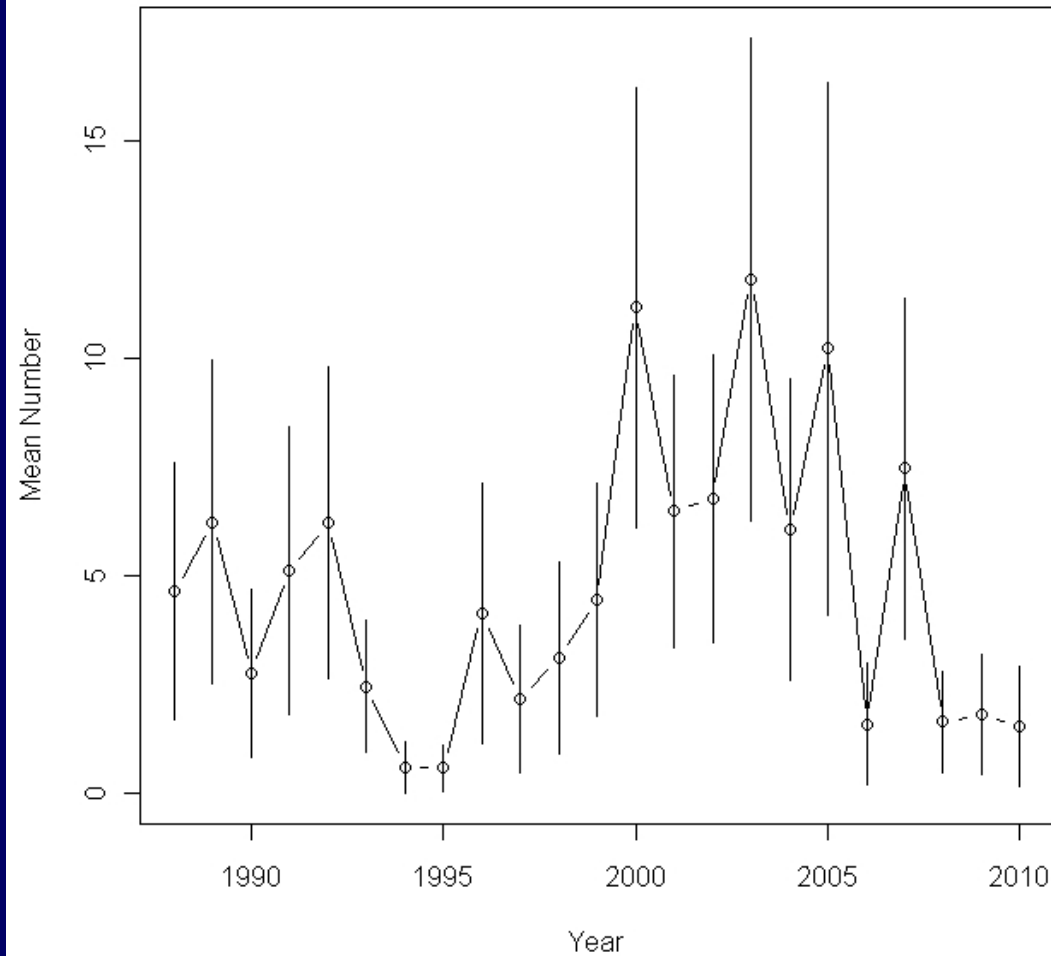


RI/MA Regional Stock Status – Additional Info



RI/MA Regional Stock Status – Additional Info

• Narragansett Bay Seine Survey Catch Per Unit Effort - Tautog



Division of Fish and Wildlife Proposed Changes

- ♦ The RI Division of Fish and Wildlife proposed a number of options to help improve local stock status, currently out to hearing
- ♦ The measures taken in 2010 were not sufficient to adequately constrain landings
- ♦ The DFWs preferred option is:
 - ♦ May 1 – May 31 @ 3 fish per person per day
 - ♦ July 1 – October 15 @ 3 fish per person per day
 - ♦ October 16 – December 15 @ 6 fish per person per day
 - ♦ Maintain vessel limit of 10 fish for everyone except Party and Charter
- ♦ Alternate option:
 - ♦ August 1 – October 15 @ 3 fish per person per day
 - ♦ October 16 – December 15 @ 6 fish per person per day



Division of Fish and Wildlife Final Comments

- The DFW made every effort to complete the regional assessment prior to the advisory panel meeting.
- The run of the regional assessment presented to the panel was completed on the day of the advisory panel meeting.
- The DFW will continue to troubleshoot and audit the assessment in the coming days.
- While a major mistake in the assessment is not anticipated, it could happen.
- If this occurs and it has a major impact on the findings of the regional stock status, the information will be made available at either the public hearing or at the next monthly meeting of the RIMFC, whichever is deemed most appropriate.

