

RHODE ISLAND MARINE FISHERIES COUNCIL
ENFORCEMENT ADVISORY PANEL
Summary of Meeting Minutes
June 7, 2011 at 6:00 PM
URI/GSO Narragansett Bay Campus, Coastal Institute Building,
Large Conference room, South Ferry Road
Narragansett, RI 02882

Chairperson: S. Medeiros
Panel Attendees: J. Rainone, E. Kearney^{Alt}, J. Shepherd^{Alt}
Public Attendees: F. Blount, J. Vivari, G. Carvalho,
RIDEM Law Enforcement: S. Hall, K. Blanchard
RIDEM F&W Staff: N. Scarduzio

Chairman S. Medeiros opened the meeting indicating that the RIMFC gave specific direction to discuss and recommend a proposed fillet law to establish a minimum size fillet limit for cod. He noted that F. Blount had brought this concern before the Council and asked F. Blount to explain his concerns to the panel.

F. Blount stated there had been a lot of abuses in the last two years of people taking undersized cod. He explained that on a few occasions DEM Law Enforcement (Enforcement) had checked boats out but found only fillets so there was nothing Enforcement could do because there was no way for Enforcement to prove that the fillets came from undersized fish. Blount felt the situation was getting worse and it was time to establish something either industry wide or just for party & charter boats. He felt it was that big of a problem.

There was some discussion from the group as to whether this should be species specific or for all finfish. S. Hall, Chief of DEM Division of Law Enforcement and K. Blanchard, Deputy Chief of DEM Division of Law Enforcement, both stated that currently there were no fillet laws on the books for RI. S. Hall indicated they had tried on a couple of occasions to pass a fillet law through this panel and the Council and each time the proposals had been shot down. They had a proposal back in 1996 and then again in 2006 and this would be the third attempt. S. Hall stated that Enforcement would prefer to have a fillet law across the board for all finfish because currently it was the easiest way to cheat if you had an undersized fish.

K. Blanchard explained there were mandated minimum sizes that had been put in place and Enforcement had no way of adhering to those standards without having the ability to check a whole fish, unless there were standards that were implemented to accommodate a fillet size. He noted he had put together a packet of information for the panel to review pertaining to fillet regulations from all the Atlantic states. At this point the group reviewed the packet of information provided by K. Blanchard which also included the proposals made by Enforcement in 2006.

The panel focused in on the state of New Hampshire's fillet law for cod which was simple and straight forward, head and tail intact or as fillets no less than 14 inches in length with at least 2 square inches of contiguous skin intact that enable the identification of the fish species. It was noted that this fillet size was based on a 24 inch minimum size cod fish.

Chairman S. Medeiros reminded the panel that they did not have a quorum so he would be reporting back to the Council as to a consensus of how the group felt about this issue.

K. Blanchard noted from a law enforcement perspective there should be a fillet law across the board

for any fish that had a size restriction. He also pointed out that currently there was a legislative bill to protect striped bass, yet we were not including striped bass in this fillet proposal.

G. Carvalho suggested the group first focus on establishing a fillet law for cod then if it worked well there may be more support to include other species.

S. Hall pointed out that the state of RI is the only state that does not have any fillet laws in place for any species.

The group discussed whether they needed to put forward some specific language or just have consensus to support the establishment of a fillet law for cod for the for-hire sector. F. Blount suggested there were three aspects; either bring the fish in whole, have the racks with the fish, or a 14 inch minimum fillet size.

J. Rainone stated he objected to the proposal targeting party/charter boats. He explained that there were a lot of boats that were playing charter boat but we actually do not know if they were a charter or not. He indicated he had seen guys out fishing on different days with a boat load of different people each time but they claimed they were not chartering. He noted there were no stickers on these boats.

F. Blount then suggested making it effective from December 1st through March 31st for everybody. J. Rainone stated it would be easier to make it apply to everyone across the board. There was further discussion about including all recreational fishers.

G. Carvalho read language he had crafted from the discussion. “No person shall possess any cod fish fillet less than 14 inches in length with at least 2 square inches of contiguous skin intact that enable the identification of the fish species while recreational fishing during the months of December 1st through March 31st”.

K. Blanchard stated that we needed to have a correlation of the 14 inch size fillet to what a legal size fish was. He noted that if you could get a 14 inch fillet off a sub-legal fish then we would need to bump that fillet size limit up a little more. F. Blount stated he thought he could get the study from New Hampshire that would show how they came up with a 14 inch fillet for cod.

The group crafted the following language modeled after New Hampshire’s law: “Cod shall have head and tail intact or as fillets no person shall possess any cod fish fillet less than 14 inches in length with at least 2 square inches of contiguous skin intact that enable the identification of the fish species while recreational fishing during the months of December 1st through March 31st”.

F. Blount suggested that the group not draft anything specific but just agree on the concept and the goal which was to either have people bring the fish in whole, have the racks with the fish, or have a 14 inch minimum fillet size for cod.

Chairman S. Medeiros asked for consensus on what F. Blount proposed; to either bring the fish in whole, have the racks with the fish, or a 14 inch minimum fillet size for cod. The panel members present agreed with the proposal. There were no objections from the group as a whole.

There were no other proposals offered.

S. Medeiros adjourned the meeting.