



**RHODE ISLAND
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT**

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Office of the Director

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To: All Interests Associated with the Rhode Island Commercial Fluke Fishery

This response and look ahead are a follow-up to the Rhode Island Commercial Fluke Symposium, held on January 27, 2012. The event was extremely informative, and I deeply appreciate the thoughtful discussion provided by the many members of the RI fishing community who attended and participated.

The Symposium Proceedings have been carefully and thoroughly assembled, and are about to be released. I am issuing this response in tandem with that release.

Drawing upon the range of views and opinions offered at the Symposium, I found that there were several common themes and shared perspectives, three of which stood out:

- Rhode Island's commercial fisheries, with fluke as a prime example, are of enormous value and need to be managed soundly, fairly, and sustainably.
- Traditional quota management programs prevent overfishing by controlling total landings, but they also engender inefficiencies. Given the nature of fishing, inefficiencies are inevitable, to a certain degree; but there is room for improvement.
- With a view to optimizing yields, maximizing economic returns, and achieving full and efficient use of available harvest opportunities, it makes sense to continue exploring ideas for alternative management approaches, provided that such approaches seek to properly balance the range of interests that collectively constitute the public interest.

With regard to Rhode Island's commercial fluke fishery, an alternative approach was employed via the sector pilot program. As evidenced by the reports and discussion offered at the Symposium, we learned a lot from that experience, with a mix of positive and negative perspectives regarding the program's suitability. Issues involving fairness and equity were of particular concern to many.

Per design, the fluke sector pilot program terminated at the end of 2011, concluding a three-year trial period. **I have since decided not to pursue adoption of that program, or any other alternative management approaches, for the commercial fluke fishery for 2012.** We need time to further develop, review and analyze proposals, carefully weighing benefits and impacts, before deciding how best to proceed. Through DEM's Marine Fisheries Program, and in close consultation with the State's commercial fishing community and the RI Marine Fisheries Council, and with the continuing assistance of the University of Rhode Island, I am committed to a continued exploration of the issue of fluke management in particular, and marine fisheries management in general, focusing on outcomes that best serve Rhode Island's broad interests.

As a next step, the Fluke Symposium will be followed by a similar fluke forum aimed at solidifying programmatic goals and objectives and developing and evaluating program design options in an open, transparent way, with input and involvement from all stakeholders.

Again, I appreciate the hard work and thoughtful contributions offered at the Fluke Symposium. I hope the RI fishing community will capitalize on the promising, collaborative spirit that filled the room on January 23rd, and help to advance the management process in a way that best addresses our collective interests.

Janet Coit, Director