

Striped Bass Management Review Committee
September 12, 2006
Final Minutes

Members Present:

Ernest Bowden (Chair)
G.G. Crump
Sam Swift
Robert Weagley
Russell Gaskins
John Wyatt
Douglas Jenkins Sr.
Cathy Davenport
Jeff Deem
Lee Roy Carson III
Pete Nixon
Kelly Place
John C. Ludford

Members Absent

Jeff Crockett
Ronald Burroughs
Eldridge Cook
Chris Walker

Staff Present

Jack Travelstead
Joe Grist
Mike Johnson
Sonya Davis

I. Introductions and Announcements

Mr. Bowden opened the meeting at 6:05 PM.

Mr. Travelstead introduced Joe Grist, head of Plans and Statistics, and Mike Johnson, planner, as new employees of VMRC who will be working with this committee.

II. Presentation by Mike Johnson on 2006 Striped Bass Chesapeake Bay harvest and tag transfers to date

For 2006 there are 407 Striped Bass tag holders with 247 reporting any harvest within Chesapeake Bay for the current year. Average size of Striped Bass harvested in the bay is 14.9 lbs, with average size of slot fish at 8.5 lbs and the >18" tags having an average size of 18.0 lbs. So far this year, as of June, twice as many >18" tags have been used compared to the slot tags for Chesapeake Bay (32,305 to 15,358).

Through June 2006, 743,000 lbs of Striped Bass have been landed for Chesapeake Bay. This is lower than the three previous years, which have ranged from 991,991 lbs to 1,096,894 lbs. Using projections based upon landings from two different methods, if current trends match previous years, then there could be a surplus of 10-15% of the current years Chesapeake Bay quota.

Looking back at 2005 realized harvest, versus expected harvest, for each individual's Chesapeake Bay landings, 184 permit holders landed more weight than was expected for their individual shares, while 218 permit holders landed less than was expected. Landings from the previous 10 years indicate that gill net harvest has grown from

accounting for 63% of the Chesapeake Bay Striped Bass weight harvest to 90%, while pound nets have declined from 31% to approximately 3%.

There has been a total 147 tag transfers in the Striped Bass ITQ through June 2006, including the Chesapeake Bay and Ocean. Thirty-one of these transfers have been permanent, 6,128 tags total, and 117 have been temporary, 23,325 tags total. The most active gear types involved in receiving tag transfers have been gill nets (7 permanent, 50 temporary), pound nets (6 permanent, 13 temporary) and the multi-gear (17 permanent, 44 temporary). The number of tags changing hands per transfer ranges from 20 tags, the minimum, to more than 500 tags. At the start of 2006, gear types owning the most Bay tags were gill nets with 46% of tags, multi gear with 25%, and pound nets with 22%. By June the gill net gear types owned 45% of the tags, multi-gear had 27%, and pound nets at 21%.

Presentation concluded.

Mr. Travelstead said we were surprised at the high average weight of fish landed in the Chesapeake Bay so far. This is a result of people using the larger tags first. As more of the slot tags are used average weight per fish should go down.

Mr. Nixon asked how many Chesapeake Bay tags were unused. Mr. Travelstead answered that we issued a little over 53,000 of each type of Chesapeake Bay tag. Approximately 21,000 >18" tags remain and 38,000 slot tags.

Mr. Carson asked what was the object of the two-tag system for the Bay. Mr. Travelstead replied to get the average weight of the fish down.

Mr. Place expressed concern that the limited use of black tags so far this year is a result of culling discards. People want to maximize the size of the fish for the black tags so they may not be using them as readily early in the year. Mr. Place feels this is a problem that may create future issues with ASFMC Striped Bass management plans.

Mr. Bowden stated that we are past the target on old fish, >7 years old, according to the notice on EEZ fishing from Dr. Bill Hogarth, and this may present problems before discards will.

Mr. Ludford was concerned that other harvesters are getting more of quota then they should due to realized harvest vs. expected harvest for the tag system.

Mr. Travelstead indicated that there is an issue that not many people are familiar with in the current transfer system. If there are unequal numbers of the two tag types that are permanently transferred in one year, the people involved in the transfer won't receive the same ratio of each tag type the following year based upon the transaction from the previous year. The total number of tags issued is based on a total percentage of the quota then divided by 2 to get the number of each tag type. This happened once in 2006 with a person receiving 100 slot tags. Next year he will receive a 50%/50% split, between the

two tag types, of those tags received in the transfer. People are not aware of this aspect of the current system and an effort should be made to notify them.

III. Discussion on a weight based ITQ begins.

Mr. Bowden asked for comments on the document on requirements for a weight-based striped bass ITQ.

Mr. Nixon commented that he thought the current two-tag system would be used for at least two years. Mr. Nixon also stated that he was not happy with it.

Mr. Travelstead stated that if the system were changed, after two years, it would take time to implement. A discussion of what will be needed for the system is needed as well.

Mr. Bowden stated that the Commission has received complaints from the Virginia Beach area about discards.

Mr. Nixon stated that there were efforts to avoid discard off of Virginia Beach. If people had more fish in their nets than they had tags other ocean tag holders were asked to come out and take the fish. He went on to state that limiting gear might be a solution to that kind of problem, although it wouldn't be popular. This problem would continue to exist in a weight-based ITQ if too much gear were set. This isn't the complete answer however.

Mr. Place stated that this year has had the worst discard problem that he has ever seen. Mr. Place stated that he feels there is culling for fish at the top end of the range for the slot tags.

Mr. Travelstead asked if a weight-based ITQ would provide better incentive to not cull catches for these high-end slot fish.

Mr. Place stated that he felt there wouldn't be as much incentive to shift effort to where the larger fish are.

Mr. Bowden felt that a weight-based system would spread the timing of the market out with less effort targeting the larger fish.

Mr. Carson stated that the two-tag system might have helped to get better prices on fish this year. Mr. Carson also stated that he did not believe that the average size would come down this year, as spring is the time to catch the slot sized fish.

Mr. Nixon stated this depends on locality.

Mr. Travelstead stated the system we have is not perfect. The biggest problem with the weight-based ITQ is tracking harvests of self-marketers. There is no system to audit their

harvest, as theirs is the only record. Additionally anyone can be a self-marketer. We will have harvests of self-marketers for the next meeting.

Mr. Bowden stated some people self-market because they have to.

Mr. Place would like to see some flexibility in a weight-based ITQ where if someone goes over their quota and Virginia does as well then it should come out of their quota for the following year.

Ms. Davenport stated that self-marketers need infrastructure to be able to sell their harvests, including arranging buyers and equipment needed to keep the harvest. Self-marketers generally sell to individuals and they don't want a large quantities or large individual fish.

Mr. Jenkins stated that the weigh-in stations would be a problem.

Mr. Travelstead said it is understood that the weigh-in stations will be difficult with people having to travel some distance to record their catch.

Mr. Place offered the idea of an automated phone system to record and document harvest. Reiterated that discards will affect this fishery soon.

Mr. Bowden stated that any plan implemented needs to be able to track individual quotas, in a timely manner. He then asked what other points of the requirements for a weight-based ITQ were agreeable.

Mr. Jenkins said points 3-6 were fine. Mr. Jenkins then asked why point 7 was in the document. Mr. Travelstead said he couldn't remember why it was there so it was decided to drop point 7.

Mr. Jenkins suggested a one-week period for mid-year audits. Mr. Travelstead stated that auditing harvests for each fisherman would take time. It is easy to do with the tag system; if you have tags you haven't caught your quota, whereas a weight-based system is not as obvious.

Mr. Bowden noted that a current report of landings would be needed for quota transfers as well.

Mr. Ludford stated that, in terms of a two-week closure for mid-year auditing, July was a month that he traditionally fishes. Suggested some other time be set aside for the closure.

Mr. Bowden suggested that a slow time for striped bass landings be determined for auditing and that maybe a full closure wouldn't be required. He then asked Mr. Travelstead if a January closure would be required.

Mr. Travelstead responded that a change in that closure would require ASFMC approval. January is also an important month for getting paper work and tags ready for the upcoming season.

Mr. Bowden asked about the current number of people who have excess realised harvest vs. their expected harvest; will a potential change to a weight-based quota be an issue for them.

Mr. Nixon stated some people will be unhappy but they will understand if we change systems.

Mr. Jenkins said a lot of people would also be happy with this change, more equity in the fishery.

Mr. Place stated if people who traditionally under harvest compared to their expected harvest suddenly catch up then there could be quota problems.

Mr. Weagley asked how buyers who are also harvesters would be audited.

Mr. Place stated that discards offset any effects of self-marketer loopholes. Mr. Travelstead said this would probably be the lesser of two evils.

Mr. Ludford recommended setting a royalty for buyers to verify self-marketer harvests.

Mr. Bowden stated this would still be a hardship for some, requiring travel of several miles to get to a buyer and this reason might be why they became self-marketers in the first place.

Mr. Jenkins suggested putting a person's actual quota allowance on their permit.

Mr. Bowden stated that the penalties for a person caught illegally marketing their catch should be severe (e.g. loss of permit). He then said any weight-based ITQ would have to satisfy the commission and fisherman on the issue of self-marketering. Data for self-marketer harvest should be ready for the next meeting.

Mr. Travelstead suggested the committee meet again in October and November and be ready to present recommendations to the Virginia Marine Resources Commission at their November meeting.

IV. Next Meeting

The next meeting will be Tuesday, October 17 at 6:00 pm.

V. Adjournment

Mr. Bowden adjourned the meeting at 7:55 pm.

