



PRESS RELEASE

Recreational Fishing Alliance

176 B South New York Road, Galloway, NJ 082054
P: 1-888-564-6732 F: 609-404-1968

For Immediate Release
Contact: Jim Hutchinson, Jr.

April 9, 2009
888 564-6732

New York's Fluke Fiasco Showcases Need for Limited Flexibility

Forced to comply with strict federal restrictions, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Commissioner Pete Grannis announced new recreational limits for summer flounder (fluke) for 2009, pushing the minimum size limit to 21 inches from 20-1/2, dropping the bag from four fish to two, and implementing a new split season where anglers are not allowed to target fluke for 17 days in the middle of the fishing season.

"These are difficult times for our saltwater anglers and the fishing industry overall," Commissioner Grannis said. "The limits that we have set - with the input of the fishing community - are not ideal but are the best compromise for all of New York's anglers under the severe federal restrictions. While making the adjustments for 2009, we will continue to use all available means to ensure that New York's anglers are not placed at a disadvantage by unfair federal requirements."

According to Jim Hutchinson, Jr., Managing Director of the Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA), such strict limits placed on the shoulders of the recreational fishing community in New York are not only burdensome, but they threaten to undermine the very conservation goals the federal restrictions are required to attain. "The RFA has said it time and time again, these increasing size limits on fluke meant to reduce the overall landings only creates a federally mandated release mortality problem, and causes anglers in New York especially to continually overfish their allotted quotas because of it."

Hutchinson pointed out that for the first time in nearly 30 years of analysis, the mortality associated with recreational fluke discards in 2008 equaled the overall harvest taken by recreational fishermen on keeper fish, according to the Marine Recreational Fishing Statistical Surveys (MRFSS). "Based on the statistical numbers from MRFSS, almost 50% of the total recreational mortality last year was attributed to regulatory discard," Hutchinson said. "Since the federal fisheries managers assume that 10% of all fluke released by anglers will die, it's assumed that 2.3 million summer flounder were killed by recreational anglers in 2008 just to comply with state fishing regulations."

Statistical reporting shows that the average weight of a 21-inch summer flounder is approximately 3.63 pounds, which Hutchinson points out is quite the trophy for many New York recreational anglers, particularly along the South Shore of Long Island. "It's staggering to think what can happen in 2009 when you consider that 2-1/2- to 3-1/2-pound fluke will be released by New York fishermen this season because they're too small to take home," he added.

The Flexibility in Rebuilding American Fisheries Act of 2009 would amend the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) to include limited flexibility for fishery managers when setting annual limits on managed species including summer flounder and red snapper, allowing the rigid timeframe for rebuilding targets to be lifted if certain conditions are present, thereby allowing angler access to the resource so long as the stocks are continuing to rebuild. Many fisheries experts and industry representatives alike believe the current management system for coastal fisheries is desperately in need of repair.

“It’s important that our legislators here in New York recognize just how important this legislation is to our local communities,” said Dennis Kanyuk of United Boatmen of New York. “It may not help solve all our fishery management problems, but it will certainly give fisheries managers another tool for the toolbox when helping protect our fishery.”

HR 1584 has already gained the bipartisan support from 11 coastal legislators who signed on as original cosponsors illustrating that many believe that limited flexibility is needed in the management of rebuilding fish stocks. “We’re hoping to quickly gain the support of a few of our friends in the Senate in seeing a companion bill sponsored alongside HR 1584,” Hutchinson said.

“This type of limited flexibility could’ve made a big difference for our anglers in New York in terms of the 2009 fluke season, and looking ahead to regulatory efforts in the future, I’m sure Senators Schumer and Gillibrand especially can see the obvious need for limited flexibility when managing our fluke fishery.”

“Anything that can help conserve the fish and support the fishermen at the same time is a good thing,” Kanyuk said, adding “we support it 100%.”

New York anglers looking to help the RFA gain support of a Senate version of HR 1584 are asked to download support letters at www.joinrfa.org.

#####

The Recreational Fishing Alliance is a national, grassroots political action organization representing recreational fishermen and the recreational fishing industry on marine fisheries issues. The RFA Mission is to safeguard the rights of saltwater anglers, protect marine, boat and tackle industry jobs, and ensure the long-term sustainability of our Nation’s saltwater fisheries. For more information, call 1-888-JOIN-RFA.