



PRESS RELEASE

Recreational Fishing Alliance

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MAFMC REJECTS MIDSEASON RECREATIONAL CLOSURES Prescribed "September 1" Closures Based on MRFSS "Considered But Rejected"

(6/15/2010) New York, NY - During discussion last Thursday at the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (MAFMC) meetings in New York City, Council members overwhelmingly rejected accountability measures that would have subjected recreational fisheries to automatic shutdowns effective September 1 each year based on the Marine Recreational Fishing Statistics Survey (MRFSS). Citing overwhelming public comment both written and orally in opposition to the measures, MAFMC voted to move the measures to the "Considered but Rejected" category as part of the comprehensive and lengthy Omnibus Amendment currently under consideration.

"The RFA is pleased these measures were rejected," said Chairman of the New Jersey Chapter of the Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA-NJ), Capt. Adam Nowalsky, in attendance at the meeting. Nowalsky who gave public testimony in opposition to the measures said "People took advantage of the opportunity for public comment and the Council listened," referencing the fact that over 60 people turned out for a public hearing held in New Jersey last month, while citing the dozens of letters written from groups and individuals in opposition to the proposed measures.

In their official written comments to the MAFMC on May 21, RFA Executive Director Jim Donofrio stressed MRFSS cannot be used to provide managers with real-time monitoring of recreational data collection, and any in-season adjustments which would be made during the Mid-Atlantic summer flounder, scup and sea bass seasons that relied on MRFSS data could be devastating to the recreational fishing industry. "These proposed management options would completely disrupt any sense of stability in the recreational fisheries. It would be nearly impossible for fishing related businesses to develop efficient business plans with the uncertainty of mid-season closures pending."

Donofrio also noted that such a management plan could frontload participation towards the beginning of fishing season, adding "Anglers would view this scenario as 'race to fish' management similar to red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico which proved to be disastrous for the fishing community."

"For those who think this is just about the party and charter boat industry, this proposed amendment should serve as a wake-up call," Donofrio said after the MAFMC's decision to reject the measures. He explained that many members of the for-hire industry stepped up to oppose the reactionary measures laid out in the so-called Omnibus Amendment, but he stressed that that midseason closures and payback schemes based on notably deficient data would have a devastating impact on the entire coastal community.

"This isn't just about the recreational anglers themselves but also the retail businesses they support, the manufacturers who build products that are sold at the retail level, and all the related shoreside industries that depend on anglers coming to the coast to fish," Donofrio said. "It's time to stick up for one another before there's no one left to defend," he added

The Omnibus Amendment would modify all fishery management plans to enact provisions of the Magnuson Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Reauthorization Act of 2006 (MSA) regarding Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC), Annual Catch Limits (ACL) and Accountability Measures (AM). The MSA reauthorization had also mandated that certain key components of MRFSS be fixed by January 1, 2009, a full 2 years before the ABC, ACL and AM provisions contemplated in the Omnibus Amendment were to be utilized.

The RFA says that MRFSS is neither accurate nor reliable enough to implement these types of accountability measures and annual catch limits in the recreational sector, adding that it is completely inappropriate for the MAFMC to move forward with the section of MSA that deals with annual catch limits and accountability measures while ignoring critical sections of the federal law that deal specifically with recreational data collection improvements necessary.

"It would be reckless and irresponsible to implement these types of reactive accountability measures without first addressing the congressionally mandated adjustments to the MRFSS system," said Jim Hutchinson, RFA's Managing Director and President of the New York Sportfishing Federation. Hutchinson said that recreational paybacks and midseason closures as outlined in the plan would have a catastrophic impact on the recreational fishing communities if activated using MRFSS. "It's been over three years since Congress told NOAA Fisheries and the Department of Commerce to fix MRFSS, and we are still waiting for the results," Hutchinson added.

The RFA points to Section 109-479 of MSA requiring the Secretary of Commerce and NMFS to establish a program to improve the quality and accuracy of information generated by MRFSS, calling for the improvements to be implemented within 24 months. According to MSA, the new program should've been implemented 18 months ago, which is when the Secretary of Commerce was required to submit a report to Congress detailing the progress made toward achieving those goals and objectives. The RFA said that none of these deadlines or requirements has been met.

The full amendment will be voted on at the next MAFMC meeting scheduled for August in Philadelphia. "Obviously, we're happy that the Council members voted to table the automatic shutdown component of this particular management plan, but it's obvious that the RFA will have to stay on top of this every step of the way," said Nowalsky.

"It's good news, but we're not out of the woods yet and our local fishermen need to stay engaged," he added.

For full report go to <http://archive.constantcontact.com/fs053/1102181706823/archive/1103481241510.html>

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The Recreational Fishing Alliance is a national, grassroots political action organization representing recreational fishermen and the recreational fishing industry on marine fisheries issues. RFA's 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 888-JOIN-RFA or visit www.joinrfa.org.