



PRESS RELEASE

Recreational Fishing Alliance (NY)

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For Immediate Release
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NY FISHING INDUSTRY MEETS FEDERAL OFFICIALS ON LONG ISLAND NOAA Administrator Meets With RFA & Allies At Request of Sen. Schumer

On Thursday, August 12, the Long Island fishing community was granted its first opportunity to meet personally with the woman in charge of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Dr. Jane Lubchenco. About two dozen representatives of the New York fishing industry including representatives from the recreational fishing sector were invited by Sen. Charles Schumer to participate in the meeting with Dr. Lubchenco at Oakland's Restaurant overlooking Shinnecock Inlet in Hampton Bays.

"It was an appropriate location seeing as how the docks were loaded with boats which used to be out on the water fishing in previous summers," said Jim Hutchinson, Jr., Managing Director of the Recreational Fishing Alliance. "Then when you look out on the jetty which used to be lined with fluke fishermen this time of year and see only about five or six anglers, you know things are way off."

Sen. Schumer told the crowd gathered that the current summer flounder regulations in New York had "put the industry on death's door," and urged the NOAA Administrator to work to secure the best available science for the entire recreational industry. "Nobody wants to see overfishing, but they want to see the science done in a rational way," the senator said in his opening remarks. He went on to support the Mid Atlantic Marine Fishery Council's (Council) Science and Statistical Committee (SSC) and Monitoring Committee (MC) newly recommended acceptable biological catch recommendations of between 32 and 34 million pounds of fluke which are being presented before the Council this week.

"We need more quota for 2011," Sen. Schumer told Dr. Lubchenco, who pledged to do what she could to support the senator's request. The SSC and MC also issued recommendations for increasing the allowable catch of porgy in 2011 from anywhere between 15 percent to nearly 200 percent.

In Dr. Lubchenco's opening remarks, she said her administration was "guided by scientific information....guided by the rule of law, Magnuson Stevens." Hutchinson was then asked to follow-up and open the session by addressing some of the immediate needs of New York's recreational sector. "First, we stressed to Dr. Lubchenco the need to see maximum total allowable landings for 2011 as Sen. Schumer requested, which can provide assistance to our fishing community by allowing us highest overall quota recommended at the Council meeting," Hutchinson said. "That will certainly provide some much-needed relief for our New York anglers in 2011."

On the topic of science and data collection, Dr. Lubchenco announced the release of a new memo of understanding by NOAA Fisheries recognizing that New York's angler registry information from the new saltwater license would be synched up with the federal government database later in the fall, a point that Hutchinson added wasn't exactly good news, but rather an admission of failure by NOAA. "Dr. Lubchenco claimed to be guided by Magnuson Stevens, yet that federal law required this angler contact information be made available to federal fisheries surveyors as of 2009, not this coming fall," he said.

"By Dr. Lubchenco's own account, we're not going to see any improvement to our recreational harvest data for at least another year, which means NOAA Fisheries is in violation of federal law," Hutchinson said. From a biological perspective, RFA believes there's no reason not to allow for substantial increase in quotas in 2011 for summer flounder and scup.

“In light of what we just heard from NOAA’s chief regarding another season of missing angler data, getting maximum allowable catch is the fairest approach considering the noted lack of improved science,” Hutchinson said. “We’re bound by a fatally flawed system once again,” he said.

Recreational fishing representatives at the Hamptons bay included Capt. Joe McBride of the Montauk Boatmen’s and Captains Association, Chris Squeri of the Marine Trades Association and United Boatmen representatives Capt. Paul Forsberg of the Viking Fleet, Capt. Desi O’Sullivan from the Celtic Quest and Kathy Risi of the Trade Winds Sportfishing and Captree Boatmen’s Association. “We’re not asking for handouts, we’re just looking for a helping hand,” said John Mantione of the New York Fishing Tackle Trades Association (NYFTTA). Mantione who owns J&J Sports of Patchogue was one of a handful of business leaders unable to miss a day of business to attend the forum, but said he was thankful for Sen. Schumer for putting this together on behalf of the beleaguered recreational fishing industry in New York.

Schumer pledged to continue working with NOAA Fisheries to get help for the recreational sector, which includes looking at a new regional approach to fisheries management in the state. Hutchinson explained that one blanket season for the entire marine district was hurting business opportunities in New York by restricting access to healthy fisheries. “We’d like Dr. Lubchenco to ask the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission and the federal statistical folks to work with New York State to look at split seasons, particularly with regard to fluke,” Hutchinson said. “It would be helpful if we could open the fluke season earlier in the spring for East End and North Fork anglers, while extending the season later into the fall for our South Shore, Brooklyn and Staten Island fleets to the west.” Hutchinson said such an approach could be well-replicated in other states where coastal catches vary region to region.

As spokesman for the national RFA, President of the New York Sportfishing Federation and governmental affairs representative for NYFTTA, Hutchinson stressed that one of the most critical items for NOAA scientists to look at moving forward is the methodology used for tabulating recreational harvest. “The way our recreational fishery is managed is wrong in terms of pounds of fish,” Hutchinson said, adding “it’s unfair to manage recreational fishermen the same way as commercial.”

For the past 10 years, the recreational industry has asked for fishery management plans to be changed to recognize the number of fish caught in the recreational sector as opposed to pounds. The RFA charges that such a plan leads to an inflated quota due to the way recreational fisheries are managed by statistical modeling. “Every time we increase the size limit to curb overall harvest when setting a fishing season, we actually increase the size of each harvested fish and the release mortality, and in turn the weight of the fish caught in pounds increases. It’s the quintessential Catch 22 and it’s destroying the recreational fishing community’s ability to properly manage fisheries,” Hutchinson explained.

“Amendments to the management plans take years, but we have an emergency here, and this is a way to fix it,” Hutchinson added. “If NOAA is truly committed to being open and to helping our recreational sector, this is something that the administration can fast track on our behalf, and on behalf of better science,” he said.

MAFMC meets at the Holiday Inn at 400 Arch Street in Philadelphia, PA today (August 16) through Thursday, with members set to finalize management measures for 2011 and adopt recommendations for next season’s commercial and recreational harvest levels on Wednesday (August 18) starting at 8 a.m. For full agenda and meeting directions, look for the latest news at www.mafmc.org.

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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. 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 888-JOIN-RFA or visit www.joinrfa.org.