**Marine Fisheries Council**

**Striped Bass Committee Meeting**

**June 1, 2023**

**Summary Report**

Attendees: Council – Dr. Pat Donnelly, Dick Herb, Dr. Eleanor Bochenek;

Staff – Dave Golden, Joseph Cimino, Jeff Brust, Jason Snellbaker, Heather Corbett, Mike Celestino, Brendan Harrison, Jessica Daher;

Advisors – Doug Taylor (Rec), Greg Cudnik (Rec), Jerry Lynch (FH), John Toth (Rec), Paul Haertel (Rec), Steve George (Rec), Wayne Thomas (Rec), John Achille (FH), Vinny DelGozzo (FH)

Absentees: Advisors – Peter Belasco, Allen Bonstead, Anthony Butch, Jerry DiPerri Jr., Edward Goldman, Adam Nowalsky, Brett Taylor

The purpose of the meeting was to review the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC)’s emergency action which requires states and jurisdictions to implement a 31-inch maximum size limit for striped bass recreational fisheries by July 2, 2023. The action responds to 2022 recreational harvest estimates, which nearly doubled that of 2021, and new stock rebuilding projections indicating a less than 15% probability of the spawning stock rebuilding to its biomass target by 2029. The emergency action will result in a one fish bag limit and size limit of 28” to less than 31” for New Jersey.

NJ DEP Fish & Wildlife (DEP) staff gave a brief presentation regarding the updated 2023 stock projections, reasons ASMFC took emergency action, and DEP’s justifications to support adopting the new regulation. It was explained that DEP intends to implement the new regulation, but the Council has the option to veto the regulation which would ultimately result in a non-compliance finding and NOAA-imposed moratorium.

The majority of the comments by advisors indicated frustration with the emergency action and reduction in the slot limit, but support for implementing the new regulation to remain in compliance and avoid a moratorium. There was no support for non-compliance amongst the advisors. A few advisors commented on the importance of taking the emergency action to support stock rebuilding and agreed that the data supports what they experienced in the striped bass fishery in 2022 and are experiencing so far in 2023: high levels of harvest and an abundance of fish near the average size of the 2015-year class.

The Committee agreed with the advisors’ frustrations regarding the emergency action, but the majority agreed to implement the new regulation to remain in compliance. The consensus recommendation is to implement the emergency slot limit of 28” to less than 31”; however, this decision was not unanimous as one Committee member abstained from supporting the recommendation until more data or information is provided by ASMFC.