**Marine Fisheries Council**

**Executive Committee Meeting**

**January 30, 2024**

The Executive Committee met by webinar to discuss a number of topics, including advisor applications and attendance, fillet permit requirements, soliciting public comments on summer flounder regulations, and spotted seatrout regulations.

Staff provided an overview of the applications that have been received for advisory appointments. Applications have been received from eight applicants. An enforcement review of applicants found no recent violations. Two applicants had requested membership on more than the maximum of seven committees. Staff contacted both for a revised list, but only heard back from one. The committee decided to postpone a decision on the other until they could be reached for additional guidance. In addition, the committee decided to postpone decisions for recreational summer flounder and striped bass advisory members in order to review new requests along with requests from applicants who had been previously turned down for space considerations. The following requests are recommended for approval.

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| **Committee** | **Recommended for approval** |
| Artificial Reef | Frank Macalik |
| Bluefish | Victor Hartley  Charles Solan |
| BSB-Scup Commercial | James Dopkin  Charles Solan |
| BSB-Scup Recreational | Victor Hartley  Stephen Machalaba  Marc Sherry |
| Blue Crab - Conch | James Dopkin |
| Summer Flounder Commercial | James Dopkin  Charles Solan |
| Gillnet | James Dopkin  Charles Solan  Frank Wagenhoffer |
| Lobster – Jonah Crab | James Dopkin  Charles Solan  Frank Wagenhoffer |
| Menhaden | James Dopkin  Charles Solan |
| Shark – Spiny Dogfish | Charles Solan  Frank Wagenhoffer |
| Sturgeon | Charles Solan |
| Tautog | James Dopkin  Marc Sherry |

Staff noted that several applicants had submitted applications up to 12 months previously, but the Executive Committee hadn’t met to review applications. There was a discussion on how to ensure more timely review. Staff will work with the chairman to investigate this further.

Staff then requested guidance from the committee on soliciting public input on recreational summer flounder management options. In addition to meeting with advisors and accepting public comment at the full Council meeting, staff has occasionally conducted an online poll to receive input. However, Council has raised concerns with the results of these polls in terms of how representative they are of the overall population. Several ways to revise the poll were discussed, but it was noted that developing a poll with unbiased questions is very difficult. Another option discussed was simply requesting written comment on the options. Staff noted that this could require significant effort from staff to compile results and for Council to read them all. Regardless, it was decided that a listserv notification would be distributed requesting written comments on the summer flounder options. Staff will compile the results and provide them to Council ahead of the March meeting. It was also noted that the approved regulations will be in place for two years, and a poll could be developed towards the end of the 2025 fishing season to evaluate existing regulations and ideas for new regulations.

The committee discussed a request to expand the special fillet permit to smaller for-hire vessels, including 6-pack charter boats. The current regulations limit participation to vessels carrying 15 or more passengers. Including smaller vessels would provide social and economic benefits to the vessels and patrons. Enforcement staff commented that it is easier for smaller vessels to violate the requirements. It was noted that other states have stricter requirements than NJ for for-hire vessels, and staff was asked to compile information from other states. There was a comment that there are only a few dozen party boats in NJ, but over a thousand charter vessels. A suggestion was made to poll charter boat operators to see who would apply for a fillet permit if they were allowed in order to gauge interest and the enforcement burden.

Staff shared spotted seatrout regulations from surrounding states, but the committee questioned what the ASMFC requirements were and whether seatrout and weakfish school together. Staff will look into these questions, but in the meantime, the committee recommends keeping seatrout regulations the same as weakfish when the regulations separate them as distinct species.

Council has expressed concern over advisors not attending their assigned committee meetings and whether habitual no shows can be removed as an advisor. Staff commented that many committees don’t meet more than once or twice during a 3-year advisory term, so repeat offenders could just not be approved if they apply for reappointment. For the more active committees, staff commented that we have in the past requested an RSVP when a meeting notice was sent out, and advisors were allowed to send a named proxy if they were not available, but that has not been done recently. The committee recommended that staff request an RSVP and allow proxies if notified ahead of the meeting. In addition, it was recommended that a point system be implemented on a trial basis where 2 points are assigned for a no show, 1 point if they RSVP they are not available but do not provide a proxy, and 0 points if they or their proxy attend. Advisors who get three points for any committee are removed from that committee. It was noted that staff will need to distribute meeting notices at least one week in advance of a meeting for this system to work.