**NJ Marine Fisheries Council Enforcement Committee**

**Meeting Summary**

**April 16, 2025**

The Marine Fisheries Council Law Enforcement Committee met to discuss issues and solutions related to shore based shark angling in New Jersey. The discussion was exploratory in nature, aiming to identify opportunities and challenges related to regulation, education, enforcement, and municipal engagement. Staff presented issues related to:

* Ambiguity in the legal definition of “shark fishing” and “shark fishing gear,” complicating enforcement efforts
* Public safety concerns arising from shore-based fishing for large sharks on recreational beaches
* Unregulated or inadequately managed fishing practices, such as mobile bait deployment
* Limited public awareness of responsible catch-and-release and safe handling practices
* Uncertainty over state, municipal, and federal jurisdictional boundaries and regulatory authority
* The need to evaluate whether education requirements, fines, and gear mandates could improve compliance and conservation outcomes

It was noted that some municipalities have indicated they might implement local regulations to prohibit shark fishing due to safety concerns. It was questioned to what extent municipalities could self-regulate. Enforcement staff noted that municipalities cannot restrict beach access due to the public trust doctrine, but they can regulate activities. Some towns already designate separate swimming and fishing areas, and may have ordinances that indirectly regulate shark fishing by banning specific equipment, such as drones and bait cannons. It was noted that municipalities can enact ordinances more quickly than the state passes regulations, and handling it at the municipal level gives towns the flexibility to act according to local pressures. Questions remain regarding how activity could be controlled on state and federal properties where municipal authority does not apply.

Concerns were raised about differing regulations by town, which may be confusing for anglers. As a way to help standardize regulations, the committee discussed developing a set of “best management practices” that identify concerns and suggested solutions that could serve as outreach and education for anglers, but could also be implemented as ordinance by the towns. Some examples include restricting shark fishing during daylight hours near swimming beaches, requiring non-stainless steel hooks and steel leaders of a certain length, approved bait deployment methods, and long handled de-hookers. Staff will check regulations in other states for useful ideas. Law enforcement staff emphasized the importance of clearly defining shark fishing and any best management practices such that they are enforceable.

Proper handling and release of the catch was a recurring concern during the meeting. It was proposed that outreach materials focus on safe handling practices, and participants discussed whether it would be possible to require mandatory training, such as what is available through NMFS.

The committee deliberated on the best way to distribute educational materials. There was support for making hard copies for enforcement to distribute during interactions with anglers, as this has been successful in the past. It was also proposed that a link be added to the NJ Saltwater Registry page that links anglers to online resources. Staff raised a concern that this might attract more shark angling activity by advertising it to anglers who were unaware of it, but it was stated that additional angling activity is less of a concern if it is being done properly. The group also supported enhanced public signage at beaches, but recommended that signs do not mention sharks directly, to prevent undue concern from swimmers.

Participants discussed the possibility of requiring a permit or endorsement specific to shark fishing. It was noted that a registry stamp may not be possible without a formal licensing structure, but one member suggested municipalities could implement special permit or badge requirements for nighttime fishing.

Increasing fines and penalties was proposed as a way to deter violations. This has been successful for reducing violations for other species, such as tautog. Staff noted that these would need to be done through regulation.

The concern about the trajectory of shore-based shark fishing is evident. Each year brings increased effort, and current regulations are difficult to enforce. Staff will pursue development of outreach and education materials that may also be implemented as regulations at the local or state level.

## Participants

Committee: Barney Hollinger, Jeff Kaelin, Bob Rush, John Tiedemann

Staff: Jeffrey Brust , Heather Corbett, Gregory Hinks, Brian Scott, Chris Petruccelli