**NJ Marine Fisheries Council**

**Nontraditional Species Committee Meeting Summary**

July 2, 2025

The Nontraditional Species Committee met with staff to discuss how best to address the diverse list of nontraditional species. Staff noted that the list was developed over several years as different people or groups expressed concern for a species. Species can be added, removed, or divided up in whatever way makes the most sense. The list includes both food fish and bait species. The primary concern for the food fish is sustainability in the event more people begin targeting them. For the bait species, the primary concerns are enforcement related, including regulatory loopholes and new fisheries.

It was suggested that the list could be divided into three groups – finfish, baitfish, and invertebrates – but all three should remain with the Nontraditional Species Committee for the time being. The committee discussed the increasing trend in sheepshead harvest and the prevalence of spearfishing for both sheepshead and triggerfish. Interest in pufferfish comes and goes, but they are often harvested in large numbers due to their size. Council has heard concerns about harvest of oyster toadfish by pot fishermen in Delaware Bay for markets in Philadelphia, but it is uncertain if this market still exists. The committee recommended prioritizing the finfish as sheepshead, triggerfish, white perch, pufferfish, and oyster toadfish. They requested staff investigate life history characteristics and check other state regulations for guidance on setting appropriate regulations. Regulations should promote sustainability without overly restricting access and opportunity.

It was noted that there are both personal use and commercial fisheries for the baitfish and invertebrate species. It was recommended that a license be required for the commercial fishery and a daily possession limit be implemented for personal use participants. Clarification of gear requirements will also be necessary, particularly for mole crabs and bloodworms, in order to allow proper enforcement because current bait net regulations are insufficient for these fisheries.

The committee recommended that the bait harvest limits should not be overly constraining. Robust bait harvest will be good for commercial operators as well as the recreational industry they support. Some species, such as sandlance, have regulations for federal waters which could be mirrored in state waters. They noted that since green crabs and Asian shore crabs are both invasive, there should be little concern for constraining harvest of those species, but they should still be licensed so we can track participation and effort.

The committee noted that there is an active and largely unregulated commercial fishery for conch, with recent inquiries about a recreational fishery, and suggested that conch be added to the nontraditional species list. Staff indicated that conch had historically been covered under the Blue Crab Committee. The committee recommended a meeting of that committee to focus on conch issues.

Law enforcement indicated that they regularly see cases with undersized windowpane flounder being harvested by anglers and suggested that this could be a candidate species for this committee. Further, they reported that there have been issues in recent years with people using seine nets to harvest large quantities of silversides and anchovies, but with considerable bycatch of undersized target species. It was suggested that it is mainly an issue with how the gear is operated, and changes to the regulations to address this concern would be beneficial. The committee requested staff investigate seine net regulations in other states for further discussion.

The committee recommended prioritizing the finfish species as above and requested staff research species biology and other state regulations prior to the next meeting. Staff indicated that this will be a priority for the summer, with a tentative deadline of the September Council meeting.