

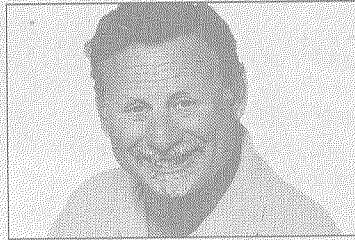
Anglers facing severe striper cutbacks next year

A very important striped bass meeting to discuss the alternatives for catch reductions to be imposed next year has been scheduled at the last minute by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) for 7 p.m. Wednesday at the Ocean County Administration building in Toms River, with another to follow on Oct. 4 at Cape May Court House.

It appears almost certain the coastal catch limit will be dropped from two stripers per day to one, but even further reductions such as closed seasons or an increase in minimum length will be required in order to achieve the 28-percent decrease required as a result of statistics showing too much mortality on stripers from age 8 up.

Though VPA estimates indicate overfishing, tag-based mortality figures are well below the target and some scientists on the ASMFC Technical Committee opposed taking such drastic measures on what has been touted as a recovered stock. Some of the burden could be taken off coastal anglers by eliminating coastal commercial fisheries or restricting catches somewhat in Chesapeake Bay, but the ASMFC Management Board didn't allow those options (noted by their own Technical Committee) to be placed in the Public Hearing Document.

This is a very complicated issue



Al Ristori

SALT WATER FISHING

involving the most important inshore game fish. Space precludes further details, and it's vital that anglers turn out to the hearing on Wednesday as decisions for 2000 will be made within a month.

Sportsmen overwhelmed Raritan Bay bunker purse seiners at the hearing Wednesday at Stockton College and one speaker noted there wouldn't have been a hall large enough to hold all the concerned anglers if the hearing had been held near the problem area instead of in South Jersey. Most speakers urged that bunker seiners be kept outside the bay just as New York has done on its side, and also called for better enforcement since even the present 0.3-mile distance from shore is frequently violated.

One purse seiner said the proposed doubling in minimum distance to a mere 0.6 miles would put him out of business when in fact that will prove little more than an inconven-

ience that might require another week to clean the bay out of adult bunkers. Another seiner practically consigned himself to the grave if he's pushed out of the bay and has to fish in the fierce Atlantic. His seamanship and virility were called into question by many speakers who noted they regularly fish the ocean in small boats by exercising normal caution. Though the seiners advocated no constraint on their part, they did call for a ban on cast nets being used by fishermen to catch peanut bunkers for bait.

Those who weren't at the hearing should make their positions known before Oct. 7 by writing to Mr. Gil Ewing, Chair, N.J. Marine Fisheries Council, P.O. Box 400, Trenton, N.J. 08625-0400, with a copy to Robert McDowell, Director, Division of Fish, Game and Wildlife, CN 400, Trenton, N.J. 08625-0400.

The eighth annual Governor's Surf Fishing Tournament will be held next Sunday at Island Beach State Park. Registration fees (forms available at local tackle shops) are \$10 for adults, \$5 for teens, and no charge for children 12 and under accompanied by an adult. Park admission is free that day to registered anglers. Disabled access is an important beneficiary of this event, and disabled anglers wishing to reserve a beach wheelchair plus a fishing outfit and volunteer assistance can contact Greg Kucharewski at 732-785-9278.

Top catches

Though the weather forecast didn't seem that bad, Friday turned out to be an ugly day at sea and it was downright evil in the Mud Hole when I ran out there late in the morning with Joe Blaze of Brielle and his crew.

Despite a 25 mph southwester and 5- to 10-foot seas, we anchored near the Arundo on good marks which never translated into much action despite having five peanut bunkers that Mike Matri of Upper Saddle River had cast-netted. Henry Kong of Colonia and Rich Rusznak of Union each released a tunny, and Kong jigged a skipjack, but there were only a few more hits during three hours of chumming in the roughest seas I've ever anchored in with a center console before we trolled back and added one more tunny release. Other boats fishing at Monster Ledge and the Oil Wreck reported similar slow or non-existent action.

Surfcasting reports are mixed. Pete Connell of Avon caught a legal striper on a popper Thursday morning at Sea Girt and said every angler he talked to from Manasquan to Bradley Beach had some action with stripers early that morning. I fished that area around dawn yesterday morning and didn't see anything caught except a couple of fluke.

At Atlantic Highlands, Bernie Eglow of Elizabeth was aboard the Sea Hunter last weekend when he hooked an 8-pound fluke off the Navy Pier.

Capt. Joe Occhipinti found only a pick of fluke and sea bass last Saturday from Raritan Bay to Monmouth Beach for the Leslie Walsten group from Morris Plains, but worming from his Little Hawk was good Sunday as Andy Feraco and friends from Nutley caught 26 stripers including six keepers to 14 pounds.

Steve Novack and his son Tom of North Plainfield fluked two hours Monday from their S.T. Barb off the beach and in Sandy Hook Channel without a keeper before heading back to Keansburg Pier where they found clear waters and ended up catching 17 fluke of legal size including three over 3 pounds up to a 6.1-pounder in 1 1/2 hours.

At Brielle, Capt. Dave Bogan reported good sea bass fishing last weekend from his Paramount. High hooks were Noah Bogdan of Caldwell with 57 bass and George Nembrough of East Hanover with 48.

Capt. Joe Bogan found his best fluking Monday in several weeks during the full-day trip of his Jamaica II on deepwater crowns. Harold Stillwell of Jackson had a limit with five over 5 pounds including the pool-winning 6 1/2-pounder. Bud Simonetti of Brielle bagged a limit to 5 5/16 pounds, and Bob Ketchersie of Trenton had a limit to 5 1/2 pounds.

Al Ristori appears regularly in The Star-Ledger.