

**Comments/issues from Portland, ME - Atlantic striped bass scoping meeting
12/8/03; 7:00-9:00 p.m.**

There were 42 participants at this meeting. These individuals identified their interests in striped bass management, as follows: recreational, only (38); commercial (1); other (2); unknown (1).

General Comments/questions:

- We do not believe the stock is fully restored because we don't see the older, larger fish that used to occur in Maine waters.
 - Striped bass should be made a game fish, coastwide and farm raised fish should replace commercial harvest in the market.
 - Maine represents the more northern range of striped bass, therefore any impacts to the stock in areas to the south will effect Maine's fishery.
 - The majority of states didn't support opening the EEZ. What happened between 2002 and 2003 for NOAA Fisheries to change its determination that opening the EEZ was not appropriate at that time?
 - Why is there a need to open the EEZ when the commercial quota is being taken and the recreational fishery is doing very well fishing just in state waters?
 - The EEZ currently serves as a marine protected area for striped bass, why not keep it that way. Efforts should focus on ensuring full recovery of the stock, including expansion of the age class distribution, before concerns related to socio-economic impacts are addressed.
 - States shouldn't be allowed to implement recreational saltwater licences until they can assure clean water both for fishing and drinking.
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Issues/concerns that should be evaluated

Stock/biological

- Evaluate the impact of opening the EEZ to striped bass fishing on the larger breeding females, assumed to be in that area, especially since we don't yet see large numbers of age 15-plus fish in Maine waters. Amendment 6 was intended to ensure protection for those older fish.
- Evaluate whether opening the EEZ, especially with anticipated increased harvest off MA, will disrupt migration routes of the stocks, and/or impact the availability of large fish to Maine waters.
- Evaluate the current health of the Chesapeake Bay stock where there are reported high levels of mortality due to the bacterial infections resulting in high natural mortality (M) rates. Recent reports indicate low numbers of striped bass in the upper Chesapeake Bay.
- Evaluate whether depletions of forage fish exist, and where, and if so what impact those depletions have on the health of the striped bass stock.
- Evaluate the impact to the stocks of other measures already implemented under Amendment 6 (increase in commercial quota, and increase in recreational bag limits in some states) before adding this additional impact.
- Evaluate how fishing in the EEZ, if in fact larger breeders are concentrated there, may impact the ability of the stock to produce large fish in the future. Is there a genetic factor in the population's ability to produce large fish that may be removed if effort is concentrated on that segment of the stock?

- The fishing mortality rate was already above target in 2002, even before the increased harvest levels allowed under Amendment 6 were implemented. Assess the likelihood of staying within the management framework once those increases have been put in effect (during the 2003 and 2004 fisheries).
- Investigate the current stock structure, especially of age 15+ fish, in the EEZ. Without understanding the existing stock composition in the EEZ we can't evaluate potential impacts of opening the fishery in the EEZ
- What resources are or will be available to adequately monitor the biological parameters of the stock in the EEZ, given current fiscal concerns in the states, as well as for the Federal government.
- Evaluate potential shifts in the stock's distribution offshore due to environmental conditions, such as, reduced competition for and therefore greater availability of bait fish due to declines in other predators (e.g., cod), and increases in nearshore water temperatures.

Management/fishery

- Evaluate the potential increase in mortality if the EEZ were to be opened, and that resulted in expansion of the recreational fishery, especially the charter/party boat fishery, in that area?
- Evaluate whether opening the EEZ would ensure the effectiveness of state regulations. How will opening the EEZ effect gamefish states?
- Determine how/if opening the EEZ may impact states' compliance with the FMP. How would compliance be determined if states implement measures that are not the same as those in the EEZ?
- Evaluate the impact of a potential shift in effort and mortality to the EEZ on the ability of nearshore and/or shore-based fishermen to continue to successfully harvest striped bass. Will this result in a shift in allocation of the harvest, and if so, what are the associated socio-economic impacts?
- Evaluate the socio-economic impacts of a shorter season, should opening the EEZ result in harvest limits being reached earlier and therefore shortening the season (e.g., on bait & tackle shops, marine supply stores, etc.)

Enforcement:

- Evaluate the ability to enforce regulations on striped bass if the EEZ were to be opened, especially given the expected increase in participants over a broader geographical range.
- Evaluate measures currently implemented in states to ensure accurate accounting for all commercial landings. Evaluate states' enforcement efforts to determine if current management measures are effectively enforced. Do states accurately track the number of commercial licenses and their associated harvests?

Safety/health

- Determine the human health impacts of striped bass from the Chesapeake Bay that are infected by micro-bacteria, if they then move up the coast and are taken in other fisheries.

**Comments/issues from Bourne, MA - Atlantic striped bass scoping meeting
12/9/03; 7:00-10:00 p.m.**

There were 36 participants at this meeting. These individuals identified their interests in striped bass management, as follows: recreational, only (5); commercial, only (10); recreational and commercial (12); NGO (1); other (7) and unknown (1).

General Comments/questions:

- There is no biological rationale to keep the EEZ closed.
 - The EEZ should be opened with a 28 inch minimum size. The stock is fully restored and Amendment 6 has adequate measures in place to conserve the stock.
 - Most of the mortality to the stock is attributed to the recreational fishery, with the commercial harvest capped by a quota there is no reason to keep the EEZ closed.
 - Keeping the EEZ closed only to prevent commercial harvest there goes against the National Standards related to fairness.
 - The EIS process should be used to identify concerns about the stock, but there are other measures, short of keeping the EEZ closed, that could adequately address those concerns.
 - Sampling off MA has shown no size differences for striped bass in near versus offshore waters.
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Issues/concerns that should be evaluated

Stock/biological

- Evaluate the extent of bycatch in the trawl fishery, thought to be great, and the impacts that catch and discard has on the population.

Management/fishery

- Evaluate opening the EEZ to hook and line fishing, only.
- Evaluate the likelihood, based on costs as well as current state regulations, of vessels from various states fishing in the EEZ off the waters of other states.
- Evaluate alternative measures to maintain conservation goals with an opened EEZ, such as requiring circle hooks for catch and release recreational fishing, and periodic closures of spawning grounds.
- Evaluate the likelihood of increased catches due to landings of bycatch of striped by vessels not currently participating in the directed fisheries in the various states. If this would occur determine the impacts on the participants in the current fishery.

Enforcement:

- Evaluate whether or not state landing laws could result in adequate enforcement in the EEZ.

Safety/health

- Evaluate safety concerns related to keeping the EEZ closed where the likelihood of vessel collisions increases with the increased congestion in state waters.

**Comments/issues from Narragansett, RI - Atlantic striped bass scoping meeting
12/10/03; 7:00-9:00 p.m.**

There were 22 participants at this meeting. These individuals identified their interests in striped bass management, as follows: recreational, only (10); commercial (4); recreational and commercial (3); other (4); and unknown (1).

General Comments/questions:

- Along with opening the EEZ the issue of equity needs to be addressed. The commercial and recreational fisheries sacrificed to help recover the stock and both should now be able to share the rewards of those sacrifices. The commercial quota and trip limits are much more restrictive than for recreational fishermen.
- The EEZ is a refuge for striped bass. The vote to include the recommendation to open the EEZ in Amendment 6 (6 to 5) was not a mandate. We have brought the stock back and now want to destroy it.
- The infections seen on striped bass in recent years are not a new occurrence; similar high proportions of infected fish have been seen periodically over the years, including in the late 1980s, early 1990s.
- Managers should give more weight to the input of public/industry advisors when management measures are approved and should carefully consider the impacts that last minute changes in plan options have on the public's perception of the management process.
- If commercial quotas are being reached, what need/reason is there to open the EEZ?
- If everyone charted exactly where they fished now it is likely that much more of the striped bass harvest than is thought to be, is actually taken from the EEZ. People need to look at their favorite grounds on a chart to see just where they fish. This is especially true for MA and RI where large areas of shoals go beyond 3 miles.

Issues/concerns that should be evaluated

Stock/biological

- Determine the current distribution of striped bass occurring in the EEZ. Individuals have observed large catches and subsequent discards of striped bass of various sizes, including large and small fish, in areas and depths where they may not be expected to occur.
- Determine the size ranges of fish currently taken inshore, as well as offshore; there may not be the difference in distribution of sizes, in- vs off-shore, that people are concerned about. We are now seeing 30-60 pound striped bass in near-shore RI waters, during December, so not all large fish are in the EEZ.
- Evaluate the extent and impact of discards in the EEZ. Are there ways to reduce bycatch in the non-directed fisheries by allowing some of those fish to be landed?

Management/fishery

- Evaluate if/how EEZ regulations could be developed with predetermined triggers that would automatically be activated should certain stock conditions be found to occur (i.e. develop a framework plan), to prevent depletions as occurred for striped bass in the past and as is seen now for many other stocks.

- Evaluate the use of daily trip limits based on weight versus number of fish to help reduce the incentive to high grade catches and to reduce the resulting impacts to the stock. If fishermen could land all legal-sized fish up to a given weight limit per trip there would be no need to high grade to get the most weight from the given trip limit. In addition, the value of the catch may increase if smaller, more marketable fish are landed.
- Evaluate whether having a single, coastwide minimum size limit would be easier to enforce and for fishermen to follow. Wouldn't that be more equitable?

Enforcement:

- Evaluate the extent of illegal fishing/black market trade in striped bass and whether opening the EEZ will impact the ability of enforcement to reduce this illegal harvest.

Safety/health

- Determine the extent and the significance to the health of the stock of the current micro-bacterial infections seen in the Chesapeake Bay and elsewhere in recent years. Has this created significant mortalities that have not been account for in the assessment or by management.
- Determine the extent and the significance to public health of the current micro-bacterial infections seen in the Chesapeake Bay and elsewhere in recent years.