

increase in mortality because overall harvest may increase; (5) allowing fishing for striped bass in the EEZ may result in landings in excess of target mortality rates set forth in Amendment 6; and (6) opening the EEZ to fishing for striped bass may have impacts on both human and fish health (such concerns relate to PCB consumption and bacterial infections in striped bass). NMFS believes the best way to address the issues and concerns raised during the ANPR comment period is to hold a series of hearings along the Atlantic coast to help determine the scope of the eventual EIS that it intends to develop. This eventual EIS would offer analysis of the aforementioned issues. In addition, during the scoping process, NMFS would like the public to comment further on the Commission's recommendations, including comments both on other potential management measures, including a no action alternative, as well as comments on other issues that the public thinks should to be analyzed in the development of this EIS.

Potential Management Measures Being Considered

All persons affected by or otherwise interested in Atlantic striped bass management in the EEZ are invited to participate in determining the scope and significance of issues to be analyzed in development of an EIS by submitting written comments (see ADDRESSES) or by participating in one or more of the scheduled scoping hearings. Potential management measures being considered include: (1) no action - maintain moratorium in EEZ; and (2) open the entire EEZ, implement a 28-inch (71.1 cm) minimum size limit, and allow states to adopt more restrictive regulations for fishermen and vessels licensed in their state (Commission recommendation). In addition, NMFS will consider additional management

measures received during the scoping process that will both benefit the sustainability of this fishery and be compatible with the Commission plan. NMFS will consider, through the EIS, all impacts, including direct, indirect and cumulative, of the potential management measures to be considered. The scoping process will also identify and eliminate from detailed study issues that are not significant. Once an EIS is developed, NMFS will hold public hearings to receive comments, on the draft EIS.

Schedule of Public Scoping Hearings

1. Wednesday, November 5, 2003 - Portsmouth, NH, 7–8:30 p.m.
Urban Forestry Center, 45 Elwin Road, Portsmouth, NH 03801
2. Wednesday, November 12, 2003 - Manteo, NC, 7–9 p.m.
North Carolina Aquarium on Roanoke Island, 374 Airport Road, Manteo, NC 27954
3. Tuesday, November 18, 2003 - Toms River, NJ, 6–9 p.m.
Quality Inn, 815 Route 37, Toms River, NJ 08755
4. Wednesday, November 19, 2003 - Dover, DE, 6:30–7:30 p.m.
Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control, Richardson & Robbins Bldg., 89 Kings Highway, Dover, DE
5. Monday, December 1, 2003 - Stony Brook, NY, 7:30–9:30 p.m.
State University of New York at Stony Brook (SUNY), Student Activities Center, Nicolls Road, Stony Brook, NY 11794
6. Tuesday, December 2, 2003 - Old Lyme, CT, 7–9 p.m.
Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, Marine Headquarters, Boating Education Building, 333 Ferry Road, Old Lyme, CT 06371
7. Monday, December 8, 2003 - Portland, ME, 7–9 p.m.
Holiday Inn By The Bay, 88 Spring Street, Portland, ME 04101

8. Tuesday, December 9, 2003 - Bourne, MA, 7–10 p.m.

Canal Club, 100 Trowbridge Road, Bourne, MA 02532

9. Wednesday, December 10, 2003 - Narragansett, RI, 7–9 p.m.

University of Rhode Island, Bay Campus, Corless Auditorium, South Ferry Road, Narragansett, RI

The public is reminded that NMFS expects participants at the public hearings to conduct themselves appropriately. At the beginning of each public hearing, a NMFS representative will explain the ground rules (e.g., alcohol is prohibited from the hearing room; attendees will be called to give their comments in the order in which they registered to speak; each attendee will have an equal amount of time to speak; and attendees should not interrupt one another). The NMFS representative will attempt to structure the hearing so that all attending members of the public will be able to comment, if they so choose, regardless of the controversial nature of the subject(s). Attendees are expected to respect the ground rules, and, if they do not, they will be asked to leave the hearing.

Special Accommodations

These meetings are physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Tom Meyer, (301) 713–2334, at least 7 days prior to the hearing in question.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1851 note.

Dated: October 15, 2003.

Bruce C. Morehead,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

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