



Maryland Saltwater Sportfishermen's Association

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President's Message

Thank God
2009 Is Finally Over

It is the time to reminisce about 2009. Good luck. I cannot wait for 2009 to end. Many of our members, and people who I consider to be good friends, suffered greatly in 2009. Some lost their jobs. Everyone lost income or accumulated wealth. And far too many lost loved ones, or their health suffered due to increases in the stress of daily life. America's servicemen continue to fight wars (rightly or wrongly) that have been financed largely through the accumulation of debt so astronomical in amount that our children's children's children will be paying for it. As to fishing, our elected officials continue to make error after error in the management of our nation's fisheries.



As I write this column, NOAA announced an interim rule to close Atlantic Red Snapper Fishing beginning January 4, 2010 from North Carolina to Key West. The Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA) has filed a lawsuit against the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) implementation of the closure. Closer to home, the NMFS has closed the Black Sea Bass fishery in Federal waters north of North Carolina (See also Executive Director Smith's column in the November Tidelines); and, Maryland's DNR just opened for comment proposed restrictions on Spring catch and release fishing.

Federal rules and regulations continue to favor commercial fishing interests over recreational fishing. It's no secret that the State of Virginia continues to sell out the Atlantic Menhaden because of Omega Protein. ASMFC's history in protecting this valuable resource is nonexistent. In ASMFC's November 2009 Atlantic Menhaden Addendum Advisory IV, ASMFC actually recommended that "Under no circumstances can allowable (Atlantic Menhaden) harvest in any given year from 2011 through 2013 exceed 122,740 metric tons." That is an increase over the current cap of 109,

000 metric tons, which we all know was total BS when it was adopted (for a lot of reasons).

If you have not taken the time to read an ASMFC pronouncement, you should (<http://www.asmfc.org/>). They are a joke. The "Management Plans" are epistles written to glorify actions that have had no positive effect upon the very fisheries that the ASMFC are charged to manage. Using lofty language, the plans speak to flawed or non-existent "scientific data" as justification for actions and policies that repeatedly fail year after year.

If the above paragraphs were not enough to wake you up, in November the ASMFC posted its: "Public Information Document for an Omnibus Amendment to the Interstate Fishery Management Plans for Spanish Mackerel, Spot, and Spotted Seatrout." In this gem, ASMFC seeks to: "Develop management programs for Spanish mackerel, spot, and spotted seatrout..." [sic].

I frequently watch both the Discovery Channel and the History Channel shows on fishing. In 2009, in response to the success of Deadliest Catch there were shows on: Alaska Whiting and Pollack fishing, Atlantic Sword fishing,, Lobster fishing, Squid fishing, and more. These programs were extremely graphic in detail of the wholesale slaughter of entire schools of fish. Factory ships were photographed as they netted millions of pounds of fish that were then processed and flash frozen. By-catch was frequently shown left on deck rotting away. On one show, a commercial Captain did not know if shark was legal or not. Hundreds of live sharks were videoed on deck dying while the Captain went on the VHF to find out if they were legal. When he learned they were not, he took his time getting back on deck. A disgusted crew was videoed kicking mostly dead sharks overboard. No one was prosecuted for the fish kill.

According to the State of Maryland: "more than 650,000 people fish each year in Maryland (not including children under 16); a third of them visit from out of state. Recreational fishing in our state has an estimated economic impact of \$1 billion dollars

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annually.” SeaGrant Maryland reports that: “boating’s total impact on the Maryland economy for 2006 [was] approximately \$2.0 billion with over 34,500 jobs provided.” According to a 2003 Stripers Forever study, recreational fishing for Rockfish accounted for over \$646 million in revenue, and 7,000 jobs. Commercial fishing for the same tonnage was not even a close second (\$52 million and 1,100 jobs).

Based upon all of the above data, perhaps someone can explain to me why the NMFS and ASMFC favor commercial fishing interests. Our members spend 20 times more money per pound employing 500% more people than commercial fishermen. At the same time, recreational fishing produces virtually a zero by-catch rate.

Let us hope that 2010 shows improvement. Maybe, just maybe, both NMFS and ASMFC will learn what Maryland’s DNR already knows: that good Government means promoting recreational fishing. If Government would, more people would have jobs, fish stocks would improve, and America’s #1 pastime would experience a resurgence. Now that’s a nice New Years wish!

I wish that you and yours have a healthy, happy, and prosperous 2010. May your seas be calm, filled with warm breezes, your lines tight, and you limit out. May the one that got away return to battle another day.

Stephen A. Shechtel
President