

May 2, 2017

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
800 North State Street Suite 201
Dover, Delaware 19901



Dear Council Members,

As of your decision regarding summer flounder regulations in New Jersey on May 11, 2017, you will be running my small fishing business. Kindly utilize your common sense and stewardship of this precious species by rejecting all of the proposed regulations. You have been presented volumes of accurate data from the private sector proving these regulations counter to what we now know about the spawning and growth of summer flounder in New Jersey and our companion states.

You are poised to annihilate the summer flounder fishery in New Jersey. When the chief conservation officer of a state, our DEP Commissioner Bob Martin, passionately rejects the proposed regulations as detrimental to preserving the fishery, you must recognize there is something desperately wrong with them.

Please enter my comments and the attached letter into the records of the meeting.
Thank you.

Sincerely

Robin Scott
Ray Scott's Dock
9211 Amherst Avenue
Margate, New Jersey 08402

I am Robin Scott, owner/operator of Ray Scott's Dock in Margate, New Jersey, the oldest "continuously same family owned" bait, tackle and boat rental business along the New Jersey Atlantic coast. This small full service marina is on the Intercoastal Waterway a mile and a half from the Great Egg Inlet, 30 miles North of Cape May, New Jersey and the Delaware Bay.

Twenty-three years ago anglers rented boats in early April to catch fresh fish for dinner after a long winter. There was a minimum size limit on summer flounder of thirteen inches but no seasons. In years since, size limits have steadily increased and seasons put in place. Seasons were unnecessary in recreational fishing since they cut off the time before children get out of school for the summer and the time after they go back to school in fall. These prime times for anglers to enjoy quiet proprietorship of the bay were legendary and a major draw to the Jersey Shore. Seasons also compressed New Jersey's fishing businesses to an average of 16 weekends to earn a living and host our guests safely on now crowded waters. That is, if the weather cooperated and fish were abundant.

Fast-forward to proposed regulations for the 2017 summer flounder season, three fish at nineteen inches per angler per day, a season start around Memorial Day and an end right after Labor Day. Stock trends in the years since 1994 are significant. Fishery managers increased size limits yearly based on the theory that by raising the size of a "keeper" flounder, the catch would be reduced. As long as the sizes remained less than seventeen inches, stocks grew and this appeared to work. At seventeen and a half inches growth flatlined. Rather than recognizing the significance of this change, it was explained away by very inaccurate science. The next two years stocks took a downturn as the minimum size of a "keeper" flounder in New Jersey was raised to 18". The easy answer from the fishery managers, "OVERFISHING"; is a term that will get the attention of anyone who doesn't know better, and incite conservationists who should be supporting our recommendations as they provide for a sustainable growing fishery, unlike regulations from NOAA. And now an increase to 19 inches is poised to annihilate the summer flounder fishery in New Jersey.

True science based on flounder sex explains why. Studies conducted by Dr. Patrick Sullivan of Cornell University show that nearly all summer flounder over 18 inches are female. Charter boat captains have been reporting this for years from their cleaning tables. Dr. Sullivan also reports that males die off by the time they reach 17 inches. No mystery here. We have been forced by regulations to only catch spawning stock in their prime. Annihilation comes as we toss back into the water all those fish under 18" in order to reach the prize. Estimates vary, but the mortality rate of those "caught and returned" fish is huge. One customer who has been fishing the Margate bay since we opened our doors in 1958, reported throwing back 77 "short" fish to retain one keeper last summer.

With the panic-evoking term "OVERFISHING" used as front page news, it has been difficult to get the truth out on an otherwise common sense no-brainer issue.

New Jersey holds the mother lode of flounder. Flounder in New Jersey is not just fishing. It is a lifestyle. Flounder are not large game fish like tuna and marlin, they are dinner. They provide a way for families to share the discovery that dinner does not arrive from Shop-Rite on a styrofoam tray. Flounder fishing provides families a means to access state and federal waters. The flounder fishery has provided young people a reason to stay in the state and build careers based on the water and fishing, my own family being a prime example. My son Ray Scott Bonar is an operating engineer in local #825 running the cranes that are building the Army Corp project seawall in Atlantic City. He learned to operate cranes at our marina. He just built a house across the street from the marina. My daughter Rachel Scott attended the University of Pennsylvania. Her acceptance into that prestigious Ivy League school moved forward by her training for a 100 ton Merchant Marine Captain's License.

In short, we in New Jersey can do a stellar job in growing our fishery if given favorable regulations. We share the Delaware Bay and must match Delaware's 2016 regulations if we are serious about preserving the most important fishery in America. Open season, four fish per angler per day at 16". Limit quickly, enjoy a fresh flounder dinner, reduce the discards and leave the prime breeders alone.

Most important fishery? Yes, it is not New England and not Alaska. New Jersey is accessible to all. Planes, trains, cars, boats and buses can all bring families easily to New Jersey to experience a lifestyle we consider a stewardship and are eager to preserve and share.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robin Scott".

Robin Scott