



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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MEMORANDUM

January 13, 2016

To: Tautog Management Board
From: Tautog Law Enforcement Sub-Committee
RE: Commercial Harvest Tagging Program

At the 2015 Annual meeting of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC), the Tautog Management Board (Management Board) reviewed comments and recommendations from the Tautog Law Enforcement Sub-Committee (Subcommittee). Subsequently the Management Board asked the Subcommittee to develop objectives for a tag program and explore tagging systems that might be applicable for live-market tautog. The Subcommittee met via telephone conference on January 12, 2016 with the following participants:

Commissioners

Adam Nowalsky, (Tautog Board Chair)
Dan McKiernan (MA)
David Simpson (CT)

Law Enforcement Committee

Lt. Jason Snellbaker (LEC representative to Tautog Board)
Lt. Doug Messeck (DE)
Major Pat Moran (MA)

Staff

Ashton Harp
Mark Robson

Ashton Harp reviewed some of the key questions for the Subcommittee to consider during the meeting, and then summarized key features of the tagging program that has been implemented for the American striped bass fishery. Members agreed that the American lobster tagging system would also be instructive to review when thinking about the tautog program.

The Subcommittee then reviewed a number of questions and concerns that would better inform the development of objectives for a tagging program. Subsequent to a careful review of issues and concerns the Subcommittee drafted four objectives for a commercial harvest tagging program for tautog:

Objective 1: Implement a verifiable tagging system that can aid enforcement and help identify illegal, unreported and unregulated fish from reaching markets.

Objective 2: Use tags of a consistent type and style among all states that include standardized identifiers of year, state, and tag number.

Objective 3: Employ tags that are single-use only. Tags must be difficult to replicate, and color should be coordinated to individually identify each state. All unused tags should be required to be returned or otherwise accounted for annually.

Objective 4: Implement a tagging program that will accommodate both the live and dead commercial fish markets. The tags used must be easy to attach, secure and have minimal to no impact on the appearance or condition of live fish for the amount of time that live, tagged fish are maintained until consumption.

In developing the above objectives the Subcommittee considered the following issues:

The Fishery

- The tautog fishery and market may be significantly more diffuse and de-centralized than American striped bass or American lobster. This makes development of a tagging program more valuable for enforcement and harvest monitoring.
- The live tautog market presents unique considerations that limit comparison with other species tagging programs.
- In a number of states fish are harvested in large quantities, but are immediately shipped out of state to specific markets, notably New York or Pennsylvania. This reinforces the need for tags that are easily identifiable by state.
- Some states have limited access permits while others have a more open fishery. This complicates the cost and distribution of tags, and affects the ability of a given state to implement point-of-harvest vs. point of sale tagging requirements.
- The Subcommittee believes there is a significant problem of recreational fishermen engaging in illegal sale without the proper permits. Tagging would curtail that problem.
- Live fish are hardy and may survive for months in tanks. It is possible for live fish in a market to be from the previous fishing year.

The Tagging Process

- The question of whether to have point-of-sale or point-of-harvest tagging requirements may depend on whether states have limited entry or open fisheries.
- From an enforcement perspective, point-of-harvest tagging is ideal in most circumstances but Subcommittee members agreed that for this fishery, point-of-sale tagging would be a tremendous improvement in enforcement capabilities.
- Point-of-harvest tagging would work better for the harvest and landing of dead tautog, while point-of-sale tagging would work well for the live fish market.
- The technical requirements of a tag suitable for live fish have not been determined and may dictate where, when and how the tag should be attached.
- Any tags considered for use should be carefully tested and evaluated with the assistance of law enforcement personnel. There is ample experience with tags that are not suitable, resulting in misuse and re-use.

- Requiring the return of unused tags would assist states in determining the extent of their fishery in establishing quotas or commercial harvest limits.
- A targeted effort to document issues and violations should be an integral part of any tagging program roll-out.

The Subcommittee discussed several issues that we believe merit further discussion by the Management Board.

- 1.) The Subcommittee believes that the development of a tautog tagging program would be greatly aided by the input and advice of selected experts from the tag industry, the tautog Advisory Panel, and elsewhere as needed. We believe the goal should be to end up with a tagging program that fishermen can use, that meets enforcement needs, and that does not detract from fish quality or marketability. The Management Board should consider how best to incorporate expert advice as we move toward implementation of a tagging system.
- 2.) Individual states may be willing or able to begin researching and testing various tagging systems, particularly for live fish. This should be explored with board members.
- 3.) The mechanics of a tagging program will be greatly dependent on whether the Commercial fishery is managed more narrowly as a limited-entry or quota-based system, or remains more of an open fishery established within commercial harvest limits.