

Management Perspective
on Bycatch

RI Sea Grant Program
Bycatch Workshop
November 23, 2002

Paul J. Howard

Executive Director

New England Fishery Management Council

M-S Act Requirements

- To the extent practicable, bycatch should be minimized and the mortality of bycatch that cannot be avoided should be minimized.
- Standardized reporting methodology to assess the amount and type of bycatch occurring in a fishery.

Bycatch Reporting

- Vessel Trip Report System (VTR) – each permitted vessel must report catch and landings in VTRs submitted on a periodic basis.
- Sea sampling/observer program – personnel on boats to observe and estimate amount of discards on a haul-by-haul basis.
- Marine Recreational Fishery Statistical Sampling (MRFSS) – Intercepts and random phone calls.

Stock Assessments

- Amount of bycatch estimated annually in assessments. Generally, bycatch estimates fall into 3 categories:
 - Stocks for which no estimates are possible
 - Stocks for which estimates are possible, but not included in catch at age matrix for a variety of reasons
 - Stocks for which estimates are available and used
 - For most stocks estimates of discard mortality is not known. Generally assessments assume all discards are dead.

Extensive FMP Measures to Reduce Bycatch

- Effort reductions
- Minimum mesh size
- Exempted Fisheries
- Year round closures
- Increased possession limits
- Selective fishing gear
- Running clock
- Mandatory observer coverage
- Bycatch limits
- Small mesh multispecies plan

Council's Bycatch Goals

1. Collect accurate data to define the problem
2. Determine “to the extent practicable”
3. Support collaborative research to improve fishing gear
4. Develop incentives to avoid bycatch
5. Maintain stocks at or close to Bmsy

Summary

- Collecting timely and reliable data is essential to meet National Standard Nine requirements and to improve accuracy of stock assessments.
- NEFMC has implemented an extensive list of measures over the years to reduce bycatch. Very little credit given.
- Observer coverage, study fleets, and more selective gear are the keys to solving bycatch problems.