



Special Senate Taskforce on Fisheries

**Draft Report
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SPECIAL SENATE TASKFORCE ON FISHERIES:

Members:

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Senator V. Susan Sosnowski, Chairperson
Special Senate Taskforce on Fisheries

I am pleased to present these findings and recommendations of the Special Senate Taskforce on Fisheries. This report represents the proactive, dedicated work of Taskforce members, state agencies and members from the fisheries industry in making recommendations, findings and developing key legislation. Over the course of six hearings, Taskforce members heard informed testimony, examined current challenges facing the state’s fisheries industry, reviewed best practices and considered the most reasonable and effective means to develop solutions to improve the economic vitality and opportunities for the fisheries industry in Rhode Island. We consider the Taskforce’s recommendations a critical first step in convening key stakeholders towards developing real solutions for the challenges facing the fisheries industry.

We are grateful to every member of the Taskforce for their willingness to take part in these discussions and appreciate the many experts who took time to appear before the Taskforce and contributed to our understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing Rhode Island’s fisheries industry. As per the requirements of The Fisheries Taskforce, we offer these findings and recommendations with confidence that we can develop solutions and legislation that will continue to serve a critical role in supporting the success and sustainability of the Rhode Island fisheries industry.

Senator V. Susan Sosnowski, Chair
D-Dist. 37, South Kingstown, New Shoreham

Timeline

- **November 18, 2010-** President of the Senate M. Teresa Paiva Weed (D-Dist. 13, Newport, Jamestown) established a Special Senate Task Force to identify and track the status and trends of the fishing industries of Rhode Island.
- **December 6, 2010-** The first Taskforce meeting was held as an organizational meeting. Michael Sullivan, Director of the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM) provided an overview of DEM responsibilities as well as federal and state regulation pertaining to the fisheries industry.
- **February 9, 2011-** The second Taskforce meeting addressed Rhode Island fisheries management. Presentations included: how local seafood products are marketed and distributed, increasing opportunities for more local seafood to be available to Rhode Island consumers; and opportunities to increase Rhode Island consumers' demand for local seafood products. Those testifying included: Mark Gibson, RI Department of Environmental Management; Ken Ayars, Department of Environmental Management; Paul Harden, RI Economic Development Corporation; Christopher Joy, Seafreeze, Ltd.; Eric Reid, Deep Sea Fish of Rhode Island; Dennis Ingram, RI Lobstermen's Association; Kevin Adams, National Seafood Marketing Coalition.
- **March 2, 2011-** Regulations and challenges facing the Rhode Island aquaculture industry was the focus of the third Taskforce meeting. A presentation was provided by Perry Raso, Matunuck Oyster Farm.
- **April 13, 2011-** At the fourth Taskforce meeting, members heard testimony regarding increasing fines and penalties for illegally possessing striped bass. Those testifying included: Mark Gibson, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management; Steve Hall, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management; Steve Medeiros, Salt Water Anglers Association; Rick Bellevance, Rhode Island Charter Boat Association; Ken Booth, Commercial Rod & Reel Association.
- **May 11, 2011-** Discussion at the fifth Taskforce meeting held- discussion surrounded a resolution to create a Rhode Island Seafood Marketing Collaborative. Presenters included: Ken Ayars, Department of Environmental Management: Division of Agriculture; Larry Mouradjian, Department of Environmental Management: Bureau of Natural Resources Management; Hannah Mellion, Farm Fresh Rhode Island; Sarah Schumaan, The Local Catch; Anne Cook, The Local Catch; Joel Hondenian, local fisherman; Steve Surget, Ocean State Fresh; Dr. Seth Macinko, University of Rhode Island.

Introduction

The Honorable Senate President M. Teresa Paiva Weed established the Special Senate Task Force on Fisheries on November 18, 2010 to track the status and trends of the fishing industries of Rhode Island. The task force is chaired by Senator V. Susan Sosnowski (D-Dist. 37, South Kingstown, New Shoreham).

The Taskforce is charged with working cooperatively with management agencies, educational institutions, environmental organizations, businesses and fishermen to meet the challenges ahead and recommend viable ideas and solutions for protecting the fishing way of life.

The purposes of the Taskforce are to:

- Track the status and trends of the fishing industries of Rhode Island;
- Understand the legal and regulatory mandates imposed on the fishing industry;
- Provide a forum for individuals and organizations in the fishing community to present ideas and identify challenges facing these communities; and
- Propose legislative and regulatory recommendations for consideration.

Each member of the Taskforce, along with others who provided testimony, presentations, opinions and assistance to the Taskforce have been instrumental in developing this document which outlines findings and recommendations resulting from the Taskforce hearings and meetings represents the first report of the Special Senate Taskforce on Fisheries.

Commercial and recreational fishing in Rhode Island are important industries that support not only the vessels and fishermen on the water but also fish markets, ship repair shops, ice houses, marinas, restaurants, grocery stores, and dozens of other shore side businesses. Rhode Island fishermen and the communities that rely on a vibrant fishing industry have been undergoing a transformation during the past decade and there are many difficult challenges to address in the years ahead. It is crucial that decision-makers better understand the values and business models that make up the Rhode Island fishing community.

Throughout the convening of the Special Senate Taskforce on Fisheries, witnesses provided testimony and recommendations related to legislative and regulatory issues surrounding the Rhode Island fisheries community. The Taskforce appreciates the time and effort of all those who participated in the hearings. The information provided throughout the course of the Taskforce served a defining role in identifying findings and action items necessary to address the challenges facing the Rhode Island fisheries industry and provided a framework for future reforms.

Findings and Action Items

- Rhode Island's lack of representation on the Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Council is one of the challenges facing the Rhode Island fishing community.
 - Action: April 14, 2011- Introduction and passage of **Senate Resolution 846**
Senator Reed and our state Congressional Delegation to pass legislation providing for Rhode Island representation on the Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Council,

- Rhode Island's current State regulations are not formalized nor accessible to the public pertaining to the sale of local fresh fish at farmers' markets and other mobile market venues in the State.
 - Action: June 8, 2011- Introduction of **Senate Bill 997** to establish a Rhode Island Seafood Marketing Collaborative to convene key stakeholders and address regulatory and marketing issues in the State around local seafood.

- Rhode Island aquaculture farms are not inspected twice annually by the Rhode Island Department of Health (DOH) and the DEM which is a violation of the federal Food and Drug Administration requirements.
 - Action: March 3, 2011- At the Fisheries Taskforce meeting, DEM addressed these concerns and discussed potential solutions through agency regulations and policies implemented at a future date.

- Rhode Island seafood products face constant domestic competition from imported seafood products, with more than eighty percent of the total seafood consumed in the United States currently originating in foreign countries.
 - Action: April 14, 2011- Introduction and passage of **Senate Resolution 850** urging Congress to pass legislation supporting adequate funding for effective and sustained domestic marketing of United States seafood.

- Rhode Island law requires that shellfish harvested from polluted waters be transferred to clean water for one year prior to selling, while other New England states require as little as 3 weeks.
 - Action: At the Fisheries Taskforce meeting, DEM addressed these concerns and discussed a potential solution through agency regulations and policies at a future date.

- There is not a federally-funded national seafood marketing fund available for the domestic marketing of American seafood.
 - Action: April 14, 2011- Introduction and passage of **Senate Resolution 850** urging congress to adequate funding for effective and sustained domestic marketing of United States seafood.

- The lack of resources and materials to support consumer seafood education programs results in consumers being unaware of the availability of locally caught fresh seafood products.
 - Action: June 8, 2011- Introduction of **Senate Bill 997** to establish a Rhode Island Seafood Marketing Collaborative to convene key stakeholders and address regulatory and marketing issues in the State around local seafood.

- Rhode Island commercial and recreational fishermen face minimal state penalties and fines for illegally possessing striped bass and for repeat offenses of such violations;
 - Action: May 31, 2011- Passage of **Senate Bill 972** by Senate Judiciary to increase the fines and penalties for illegally possessing striped bass.

- A coordinated approach among state agencies and stake holders is crucial to a successful seafood marketing campaign in the state.
 - Action: June 8, 2011- Introduction of **Senate Bill 997** to establish a Rhode Island Seafood Marketing Collaborative to convene key stakeholders and address regulatory and marketing issues in the State around local seafood initiatives.

Recommendations

- Letter to RI Congressional delegation requesting any information regarding offshore energy development be forwarded to the Task Force.
- Develop research and findings related to the European off shore wind energy projects and impact on aquatic species and reefs.
- Develop research of federal and state statutory and regulatory systems that manage and enforce Rhode Island fisheries policies.
- Identify legislative priorities resulting from the Rhode Island Seafood Marketing Collaborative for the promotion of locally caught seafood, funding and state-wide future marketing opportunities.
- Identify advisory committee members in the fishing industry that can work the Taskforce in identifying future recommendations and policy items as they related to Rhode Island's fishery management.
- Identify legislative or regulatory provisions in Rhode Island which restrict shellfish harvesting time periods.
- Develop research and recommendations to identify local economic initiatives that would support small fisheries organizations and businesses.
- Work with DEM and DOH to facilitate adoption of regulations identified in Taskforce hearings that currently are an impediment to Rhode Island's aquaculture industry, seafood marketing initiatives directed at farmers' markets and a level playing field for marketing shellfish harvested from polluted waters.