

Cobscook Scallop Fishermen's Meeting

Sponsored by the Cobscook Bay Fishermen's Association and the Cobscook Bay Resource Center

Pembroke Elementary School

March 5, 2012

20 participants. Will Hopkins moderated the meeting. Heidi Leighton took notes.

Will Hopkins began the meeting by summarizing the meeting held on February 27th. He reminded the group that tonight's meeting is sponsored by the Cobscook Bay Fishermen's Association and that the three rules of CBFA meetings apply:

1. Everyone gets a chance to speak.
2. Only one person speaks at a time.
3. Don't make it personal.

There were no objections to these rules.

The suggestions for scallop management and how to open the closed areas discussed at last week's meeting do not come from DMR. The suggestions come from participants at the Scallop Advisory Council meeting on February 15th or our meeting on February 27th. Everyone had the chance to suggest any option and have it added to the list.

Suggestions from the SAC meeting and last week's Cobscook meeting have been boiled down to a page and half of material for us to work through tonight.

A list of the following questions for the Scallop Advisory Council was posted during the meeting to guide discussion:

1. How do we end the boom and bust cycle?
2. How do we take responsibility for the fisheries in our own backyards?
3. How do we deal with the fact that there are not enough scallops in Cobscook Bay to support the entire Maine scallop fleet?
4. How do we better balance the needs of the mobile fleet with the needs of the home fleet?

During last week's meeting there were three items that had general agreement:

- One size does not fit all in fisheries management.
- Declare into one closed area.
- All closed areas should be open on the same day.

Will informed the group that we would review all the suggestions and take votes to see if there is agreement on any of them. If an issue is contentious we can have a secret ballot, but otherwise a 2/3 majority vote will be required to add it to a list of recommendations from this group to the Scallop Advisory Council. Will reminded the group that we are looking for areas where we have agreement.

Butch Harris reported that he had heard that the DMR has already made their decision about the Cobscook scallop fishery and it will include a 32 day season, three days per week for fishing, one day of the three for fishing in the closed area, and a 135 pound daily catch limit. The issue of when urchin season will begin in the closed area has not been decided.

Season Length

Discussion:

- Support the 42 day season if all the closed areas open on the same day.
- If we have a 42 day season and we allow one day per week fishing in the closed area this will give us a total of 14 days of fishing in the closed area.

- The DMR is estimating that the Whiting/Dennys Bay closure area will be overfished in four days if 50 boats fish there.
- How can DMR use 2 year old survey data to decide what to do with our closed area?
- The days of the week allowed for fishing should not be the same days as for urchins.
- You should be able to go fishing on the days you choose. This would be a reason to use the black box.
- The initial cost for the black box would be \$850 and the cost per month would be \$89.

Vote: Would you be interested in trying the black box this year?

There was some interest but no one was ready to commit to this until they know how many days the scallop season will be.

AGREED: We support a 42 day scallop season.

Declaring into an Area

Discussion:

- If we are declaring just for a closed area, Whiting/Dennys Bay and the St. Croix River should be considered one area.
- We should be declaring for everything above the International Bridge.
- We should be declaring for everything from Bog Brook to the Canadian border.
- The Cobscook management area should be changed to Bog Brook to the Canadian border. Everyone who wants to fish here should have to declare to fish in this area only.
- The Cobscook zone should be for all state fisheries.

AGREED: We support opting in to one closed area.

The majority supported this suggestion as long as the Cobscook closed area includes both Whiting/Dennys Bay and St. Croix River.

AGREED: We support opting in to a Cobscook zone which includes everything from Bog Brook to the Canadian border.

Although there was some discussion about when the closed areas should be opened for urchins there was no agreement in the group as to a date. Some suggested that the Urchin and Scallop Advisory Councils should work this issue out.

AGREED: We support allowing one day of fishing per week in closed areas for 14 weeks.

Vote: How should decisions about shutting down fishing in the closed areas be made in the 2012-13 season?

AGREED: However many days are set for fishing in the closed areas, Cobscook fishermen should have a meeting when half of those days have been fished to review the status of the resource. At this meeting, a vote should be taken as to whether to ask the Commissioner to shut the fishery down to protect the resource.

AGREED: Closed areas should not be established on international boundaries.

AGREED: Scallop closed areas should be open at the same time as all other scallop fishing areas.

Vote: Closed areas should be opened on a different day for divers.

There was no agreement on this suggestion.

AGREED: Closed areas should be open to draggers and divers on the same day.

Catch Reporting

There was no support for daily reporting in the closed areas or for the swipe card.

Meat Count

AGREED: Other areas should decide on their own meat count or be able to decide not to have a meat count if that is what works for their area.

AGREED: There should not be one meat count for the entire state.

Catch Limits

AGREED: The daily catch limit should be left the way it is.

AGREED: There should not be a statewide 50 pound daily catch limit when the closed areas are open.

Closures

Rotational closures do not make sense for Cobscook. Other areas should be able to decide for themselves if they want rotational closures.

All closures should be for no longer than one year.

AGREED: We will not support further closures until we know the plan for the specific area that is proposed to be closed including: the length of time the area will be closed, how the area will be reopened, and how the area will be surveyed.

AGREED: We do not support leaving closed areas closed.

There was no agreement on the issue of closing areas for all similar gear types.

Gear Restrictions

There was no agreement on gear restrictions. Some people felt that if gear restrictions were imposed they should be for the entire state.

Zones

AGREED: We want a Cobscook scallop zone with a council like the lobster fishery has.

Length of Season

There was no agreement on which days should be set as fishing days. Some liked the idea of three days in a row, some liked the option of picking which days to fish on your own, and some suggested that fishermen be allowed to call in on the days they were going to fish.

Enforcement

A suggestion was made that penalties be increased for being caught with more than your daily catch limit. Some felt that you should lose your license for this offense.

Tom Pottle agreed to take the list of what we have agreed on to the SAC meeting on March 7th in Bangor.

Paul Cox announced that Trish De Graaf will be in the area to meet with Cobscook fishermen on March 22.