

SENATE: Reauthorizes limits in summer flounder catch

N.J. CONGRESSMEN: Stave off sharp quota cutbacks

House action due on flounder limits

Posted by the [Asbury Park Press](#) on 12/8/06

BY [KIRK MOORE](#)

STAFF WRITER

In a nearly 11th-hour reprieve, the Senate late Thursday approved a reauthorization bill for the Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act, leaving fishermen and environmentalists alike crossing their fingers in hope of House approval today.

With the Democratic victories in last month's Congressional elections, many people who spent years working toward a new version of the nation's key marine conservation law were glum about prospects for passage in this lame-duck session.

But key sponsors like Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, and Rep. Richard Pombo, R-Calif., who lost his seat, had promised one final push. That bore fruit in the Senate but it was unclear if the House could do the same today, advocates from fishing and conservation groups said.

Reformists were glad to see the Senate bill, with its insistence that scientific analysis get priority when making management decisions.

New Jersey fishermen, especially party boat operators, got their state's delegation to insert language that may stave off sharp cutbacks in the 2007 summer flounder fishery, which makes up about 40 percent of the fleet's business.

Whatever the outcome of this week's effort in Washington, New Jersey recreational advocates are still calling on fishermen to pack a meeting Monday in New York City, where the 2007 flounder catch limits could be decided, said Thomas P. Fote, legislative chairman of the Jersey Coast Anglers Association. The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission meets Dec. 11 to decide whether it will set the 2007 quota at 19.9 million pounds — the limit preferred by recreational groups — or knuckle under to federal fisheries Director William Hogarth's demand to abide by a recommended 12.98-million-pound limit. Scientific advisers to the National Marine Fisheries Service calculate that the lower quota is needed if the service is to achieve its legal mandate to nearly double the total flounder biomass to 204 million pounds by 2010.

Reps. H. James Saxton, R-N.J., and Frank J. Pallone Jr., D-N.J., and others in the state delegation got a provision inserted in the Magnuson-Stevens bill that will extend that rebuilding period to 2013, Fote said.

"This will help if passed but will only address some of the problem," Fote reported in an e-mail to JCAA members Thursday morning.

In the view of many fishing groups, the 204 million-pound target itself is unrealistic and probably unattainable.

Keeping that as the official goal will keep quotas low, Fote said: 17.1 million pounds next year, 19.6 million pounds in 2008 and 22.7 million pounds in 2009. All are short of this year's 23.59 million-pound quota.

Environmental groups that have clashed in the past with fishermen over summer flounder have kept a generally low profile in the quota debate. But they have warned against seeking special treatment for the flounder fishery in Magnuson-Stevens, worried that an amendment could undermine the law's mechanisms to force the rebuilding of fish stocks.