

"ABTA Executive Director Rich Ruais comments for press release on dog fish, every tuna fishermen's nightmare."

ABTA "Protecting your Fishery"

FORDM Dogfish Press release (via PR Newswire at 10:45 5-04-09)

Threat of dogfish sharks unite commercial and recreational fishermen from Maine to North Carolina.

Hundreds of millions of these voracious predators are impacting every fishery in the region.

An unprecedented alliance of commercial, recreational and party/charter boat fishermen and associated businesses has formed Fishermen Organized for Rational Dogfish Management (FORDM) to deal with a looming crisis. FORDM has requested assistance from Dr. Jane Lubchenco, newly appointed National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration head, in dealing with an out-of-balance population of highly predatory spiny dogfish that is depleting other Northeast and Mid-Atlantic fisheries. Scientists estimate their biomass at up to four billion pounds.

The classic Fishes of the Gulf of Maine says of this shark species "voracious almost beyond belief, the dogfish entirely deserves its bad reputation. Not only does it harry and drive off mackerel, herring, and even fish as large as cod and haddock, but it destroys vast numbers of them.... they prey on practically all species of Gulf of Maine fish smaller than themselves." Spiny dogfish can exceed 5 feet in length.

The huge population of these ravenous sharks is holding back the recovery of New England groundfish and many others fish stocks, either feeding heavily on the more valuable species or on their prey. In 1992, Dr. Steven Murawski, now National Marine Fisheries Service's chief scientist, wrote "given the current high abundance of skates and dogfish, it may not be possible to increase gadoid (cod and haddock) and flounder abundance without 'extracting' some of the current standing stock." The abundance of dogfish today greatly exceeds that of skates, comprising over half of the fish taken in the Northeast Fisheries Science Center's annual trawl surveys.

Conservatively, spiny dogfish require a daily food intake of 1½% of their total body weight. This equates to a minimum of two and a half million metric tons of prey species eaten every year. In 2007 the commercial catch of all species from East coast fisheries was 2/3 of a million metric tons.

Throughout their range spiny dogfish are also seriously interfering with traditional fisheries. According to Ray Bogan, legal counsel for United Boatmen and member of one

of New Jersey's oldest party/charter fishing families, there are more spiny dogfish than he has encountered ever before in a lifetime spent on Mid-Atlantic waters, it's impossible to fish in areas that they have seasonally "taken over," and every year they take over more fishing grounds. Hank Lackner, Captain of the F/V Jason & Danielle out of Montauk and participant in a number of government sponsored trawl surveys, reports that spiny dogfish are destroying 10 years of efforts to rebuild other stocks and are overpopulated from the beach to 250 fathoms, from Cape Hatteras to the Canadian line.

Dick Grachek, owner of the F/V Anne Kathryn out of Point Judith, relayed a message from Captain Joe Mattera, who had just curtailed a scup trip because of the extraordinary number of dogfish he encountered. His net was plugged with spiny dogfish in five of the seven tows he made. Jim Thompson, a recreational fisherman from Delaware, reported that when wreck fishing he catches 20 spiny dogfish for every targeted fish. According to Cape Cod gillnetter Jan Margenson "the codfish gear we haul is plugged with dogs and the occasional cod we catch is stripped to the bone of flesh. They act just like piranha, only it's our catch that they're eating." Chris Long, a San Francisco resident who comes to fish on Cape Cod for striped bass and tuna for five days every three weeks in the spring and summer, is now "doing (fresh water) bass fishing in the Cape Ponds" instead.

Craig Banks operates a commercial fishing website. He has spoken with hundreds of recreational and commercial fishermen from New England down to North Carolina about the dogfish issue and says "the general consensus is that dogfish numbers have been building and now they often make fishing impossible. One of the biggest concerns is the voracious appetite of the hordes of dogs that travel the coast, eating everything in their path." *And Rich Ruais, Executive Director of organizations whose members target tuna, reports "there is not a doubt in any tuna fisherman's mind that the abundance of dogfish throughout the Northeast has severely impacted tuna catches over the last decade. If action is not taken soon to control the hoard of dogfish, the ecosystem in general and the migratory habits of bluefin tuna in particular may be permanently altered and, in spite of our rigorous conservation efforts, the traditional giant tuna fisheries may be destroyed forever."*

According to Jim Donofrio, Executive Director of the Recreational Fishing Alliance and an organizer of FORDM, "tens of millions of recreational fishermen, tens of thousands of commercial fishermen and the thousands of businesses that depend on them are suffering a double whammy because of a management philosophy distorted by foundation-funded marine 'conservationists' with no regard for fish or fishermen, just the crises they create. As the huge biomass of dogfish is reducing the populations of other, far more valuable species, fishermen are required by law to compensate by catching less of those species. This is becoming increasingly more difficult – and more expensive – because of interference from the ravenous hoards of spiny dogfish."

The Magnuson Act, which establishes federal fisheries policies, has been amended by pressure from rich environmental activist groups, making it virtually impossible for managers to effectively address issues like this. Coastal legislators including New Jersey Congressmen Pallone, Lobiondo and Adler,

Massachusetts Congressman Frank and North Carolina Congressman Jones, who are familiar with the untenable position that the federal law puts fisherman in, have introduced legislation, H. R. 1584, addressing some of its shortcomings.

Nils Stolpe, another FORDM organizer and Communications Director of Garden State Seafood Association, emphasizes that Dr. Lubchenco now has an opportunity to prove to the fishing community that concerns over her association with the Pew Charitable Trusts are unfounded. “Pew is inextricably linked to the advocacy science that seems designed to turn the public and our elected officials against fishermen of every stripe. This will be her first opportunity to demonstrate that she will guide NOAA with a balanced hand, utilizing objective science and fairly serving all of her constituents, fishermen included.”

The FORDM letter to Dr. Lubchenco is available at <http://www.fishnet-usa.com/dogforum1.htm>, along with additional fishermen’s comments and other material on dogfish.