

## **Sea Urchin Zone Council Meeting Summary April 30, 2018 in Augusta**

**DMR staff:** Melissa Smith, Maggie Hunter, Deirdre Gilbert, Colonel Jon Cornish

**SUZC members present:** Tracey Sawtelle (Chair), John Dray, Tim Peterson, Brian Preney, Alan Knowlton, Joe Leask, Clint Richardson, Mark Nickerson, Chenda Doeur

**SUZC members absent:** Teresa Johnson, Steve Eddy, Larry Harris, Clint Richardson, Chuon Muth

**Public:** Jim Wadsworth, Doug Rasher, Thew Suskiewicz, Tony Fitch, Tristan Smith

Meeting commenced at 4:08 pm.

### **I. Welcome and Introductions**

Chair T. Sawtelle welcomed the group and asked everyone to introduce themselves around the room, both council members and audience.

### **II. Approval of last meeting minutes (3/22/18)**

C. Richardson moved to accept; B. Preney seconded the motion.

**UNANIMOUS. Approval of minutes passed.**

**(Correction noted: potential closures discussed in March were from Cutler to Lubec)**

T. Sawtelle described a prior effort where urchins were placed inside Goose Island, and a gentlemen's agreement was reached not to fish them until the following December. Some people who fished there never participated in moving the urchins. The Council discussed the outcomes of various efforts to move urchins. J. Leask requested an agenda item for a future meeting: *What would it take to buy low quality urchins and return to bottom to improve quality?*

M. Smith reviewed the agenda.

### **III. DMR Update**

#### **a. Current instate research (Bigelow)**

Doug Rasher introduced himself as a senior scientist at Bigelow Laboratory. He was previously at the Darling Marine Center. His research focus is on the ecology of kelp forests. He wrote a grant proposal last year for a Maine Sea Grant award. They will start their field work this summer, which will continue for 2 years.

Thew Suskiewicz introduced himself. He just started at Bigelow. He will lead the field research for this project. He has also worked at the Darling Marine Center and was working in Canada, looking at urchins in the St. Lawrence.

This project is looking at how seaweed compositions have changed. Areas that historically have had a lot of urchins do not seem to have them anymore. How have seaweeds changed and how have urchins responded to that? There is plenty of food and these areas have historically held large populations. They surveyed the coast last summer from Penobscot Bay to Jonesport and the project will occur from Casco Bay to Jonesport. They have historical data from the 1980's and 1990's that describes urchin numbers and the composition of the kelp forest. They want to develop a comprehensive baseline, to better understand what we are seeing with urchin ecology.

J. Dray mentioned that in Cobscook, when people started dragging, it ripped out the kelp. That has to have an effect.

J. Leask asked, are you looking at why things have changed? He has seen kelp retreating on its own, not necessarily because of dragging. It would be interesting to know why, as we explore trying to resettle areas.

T. Sawtelle noted that places at home (Lubec area) where you used to get big urchins, there are now piles of little urchins.

J. Leask said we should be trying to determine how can we best help the resource establish barrens.

D. Rasher said he wanted to show the Council members the data and talk about objectives before they get started. They want to revisit the places they were before and repeat the methodology, but there is some scope to add on to that. He would love to have more discussion with the Council to try to meet the SUZC needs.

M. Smith asked about the project start date, so that the research subcommittee could convene in advance. The visual dive surveys start in late May or early June.

J. Wadsworth asked about *Diasaphonia japonica* – it looks like a red hair net and urchins seem to be eating it. T. Suskiewicz said it is super common in York and starting up coast, choking out everything else.

The grant for this project requires documenting the composition of seaweed, macro invertebrates, and fish – basically, whatever they can see. There is no suction sampling. Next summer they will look at rates of recruitment and predation. There are going to be 20-25 sites, 5 per subregion.

M. Smith said she would schedule a meeting of the research subcommittee for May 17 or 21 in Ellsworth to discuss this project in more detail and get additional industry feedback if that would be helpful.

#### b. Urchin Research Priority Setting meeting (April 24<sup>th</sup>)

M. Smith reviewed the research priority meeting results. It was noted that setting parameters for new licenses and different entry mechanisms was identified as one of the priorities. M. Smith said that limited entry could be the topic of a future SUZC meeting. T. Smith said he supports an apprenticeship program.

#### c. DMR Feedback- Council Motions

##### *A: Motion on alternative calendar structure for Zone 1 Dive (Early/Late)*

- Motion as offered: 20 harvest days of a 30 day calendar, with 9 totes daily limit
- DMR counteroffer: 20 harvest days of a 30 day calendar, with 7 totes daily limit
- ▶ Rationale:
  - An increase in harvest days has already occurred from 10 to 15 days
  - Zone 1 cannot sustain additional fishing effort

M. Smith explained the reasoning for DMR not supporting 20 harvest days in a 30 day calendar with a 9 tote limit. C. Thompson asked if landings increased last season. M. Hunter said no, but that the weather was terrible. She also noted that most harvesters do not get 12 totes. The average is closer to 9. That is why you would need to reduce the number of totes to 7 in order to be able to give more days without increasing the landings.

M. Nickerson and C. Thompson said they are interested in a quota system. J. Leask asked about the potential of a weekly tote limit. J. Dray said those things would work well in a bad weather year. T. Fitch said that it might increase pressure on the resource. T. Sawtelle noted that it could create problems for buyers, if everyone goes and gets a lot at one time. J. Wadsworth asked if the buyers could handle more? C. Doeur said that labor is a concern. Harvesters and dealers need to work together for the industry to survive.

J. Leask asked where the federal legislation to change the USFWS inspection rule stands? M. Smith will follow up with Deputy Commissioner Mendelson for an update.

**M. Nickerson moved to leave the season as 15 days out of 20 with a 12 tote limit. C. Richardson seconded the motion.**

**UNANIMOUS: Motion passes.**

*B: Modification to tote measure*

- Motion as offered: fill a standard tote to the top and be level such that a straight edge would swipe clear and use a standard cover
- DMR counteroffer: a reduction of 1 tote/day if this is the desire of the Council
- ▶ Rationale:
  - Over the course of a day's harvest, allowing totes to be filled to the top represents an increase in urchins in possession to the harvester. DMR does not support an increase in effort. To compensate for the anticipated increase in volume, a reduction in daily limit would be required.

The Council discussed the merits of a being able to fill the tote to the top. Colonel Cornish said it would be enforceable that way if the Council wanted. Ultimately, the Council did not want to lose a tote in order to make this change at this time. Some work could be done during the upcoming season to determine how much this change would add to a harvester's daily landings.

#### **IV. Potential Discussion Topics:**

##### Conservation closures:

M. Smith asked if the Council has any interest in other areas?

J. Dray noted that Cutler to Lubec is a dead zone. M. Nickerson asked, if we close an area, does it come off of the harvestable biomass? M. Hunter said we could calculate that.

A suggestion was made to only have the late season in that area. C. Doeur said we need to have product in September for the market.

J. Dray made a motion to only have the late season from Cutler to Quoddy Head (Cutler Harbor to Bailey's Mistake).

M. Hunter suggested that it may be better to close for December, so that it is not advantaging one group? Or have it open only on those dates when the early and late seasons overlap?

J. Dray withdrew his motion.

M. Smith asked the Council about the Cat Ledges closure.

C. Richardson and M. Nickerson recommended continuing the Cat Ledges closure so that there was a location available if there was something that the Council wanted to try.

J. Leask said that the reason for choosing Cat Ledges is that Sheepscot Bay has a good chance for recovery. It has deep cold water, and there are small pockets of urchins there. Through this research, we hoped to learn how to help a recovery. Originally we wanted to put 100 trays in...we put 9 trays in. You need the numbers to fend off the crabs.

B. Preney said he doesn't care if we keep a postage stamp closed, but he wants to open the Southport shore. And as far as relocation – he would like to know if you can put urchins where there aren't any and have them survive? In a spot where urchins have died off, he doesn't think any amount of effort can change things. T. Fitch asked if he was saying that we had nothing to do with decline? B. Preney said, no we did, we removed urchins and changed the ecology – it caused a phase shift and predators came in.

C. Richardson made a motion and M. Nickerson seconded to keep the Cat Ledges closure. They accepted a friendly amendment by B. Preney to exempt the Southport shore.

**UNANIMOUS – Motion passes.**

#### Zone line removal:

T. Sawtelle said that if you got rid of Zones, you would need a tote reduction for Zone 1 because they would get more days. C. Doeur said he thought it would be bad for the resource. B. Preney said he thought opinions were 50/50 on keeping the Zones. He is inclined to experiment with what Zone 2 has done. They seem to be harvesting a better urchin than Zone 1. More days, fewer trays.

It was agreed that this is probably a single meeting topic. It should be tabled and combined with limited entry.

T. Smith said that first dibs on Zone 2 licenses should go to Zone 1 divers.

J. Dray made a motion to table to a future meeting. T. Sawtelle seconded.

**UNANIMOUS – Motion passes.**

#### Quotas:

M. Nickerson said he would like quotas. C. Thompson said this a moot point until you figure out the Zones. B. Preney said the quota came up because of trying to get out of days. But buyers need a steady stream of product. 15 days out of a 20 day season was a good step. T. Sawtelle agreed that being able to pick days helped a lot. He said the more we do to give ourselves more, it's going to end up biting us.

T. Sawtelle made a motion to adjourn. J. Dray seconded.  
**UNANIMOUS – Motion passes.** Meeting adjourned at 6:11 pm.

**APPENDIX: Meeting Slides**

# Agenda



## Sea Urchin Zone Council Meeting Agenda

Monday, April 30, 2018 @ 4:00 pm  
 DMR HQ Rm 118, 32 Blossom Lane, Augusta, ME

*(NOTE: No SU2C Research Subcommittee Meeting.)*

- I. Welcome and introductions
- II. Approval of last meeting minutes (03/22/18)
- III. *DMR Update:*
  - a. *Current in-state research projects (Bigelow)*
  - b. *Urchin Research Priority Setting meeting (April 24<sup>th</sup>)*
  - c. *Feedback on March Council motions*
- IV. **Potential Discussion Topics:**
  - a. *Conservation measures for Zone 1 and Zone 2*
  - b. *Zone removal*
  - c. *Quotas*
  - d. *Harvest overlap with open calendar days*
    - i. *Diving – between zones*
    - ii. *Dragging – between early and late*
- V. Other Business
- VI. Adjourn

# Research Priorities


Management	Assess relocation strategies
	Stock enhancement in low recruitment areas Why is recruitment low in some areas?
	Investigate implications of limited / closed fishery
	Set parameters for new licenses. Investigate entry schemes
	Research alternate zone management structures (smaller or multiple zones)
Ecology	Understanding source and sink to influence management
	How invasive macroalgal species impact urchins
Assessment	What drives movement patterns? Feed, current, wave entering, substrate, depth
	Influence of deep-water populations on fishery/recovery
	Research farming / ranching as alternative management strategy
	Evaluate how urchins fit into COM ecosystem to inform ideal biomass
	Where does depleted fishery fit into DMR priorities

## DMR Feedback: Council Motions

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  - Per Commissioner Keliher – A increase in harvest days has already occurred from 10 to 15 days
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## DMR Feedback: Council Motions

- ▶ B) Motion on modification to tote measure
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## Conservation Closures

- ▶ With the expiry of Cat Ledges, are there other areas of particular interest/concern that the Council would like to recommend for a conservation closure?



## Zone Removal

- ▶ Requires legislative effort
- ▶ Council would need to develop an alternative harvest plan to replace the existing FMP, if there is desire to move away from zones
  - For example, how would Zone 1 be incorporated into the overall permits/effort management? What would the daily trip limit look like? How would calendars change?



## Quotas

- ▶ Currently, Zone 1 permit holders may harvest 15 days x 12 totes for a total of 180 totes.
  - Not all permit holders harvest a full 15 days
  - Zone 1 cannot sustain an increase in effort
  - While quotas have been established for elvers, it was not a choice by the DMR, but rather ASMFC
- ▶ Additionally, a substantial reduction in State allocation coincided with the advent of IFQ
  - What would the reduction be? How would quota be shared? What about latent effort?

## Harvest days overlap

- ▶ Ways to mitigate?