

EEL WORKGROUP MEETING SUMMARY

November 3, 2016

Five workgroup members were present.

The meeting was held at Tawes State Office Building and was the first meeting of the eel workgroup. The primary goals of the meeting were to discuss ground rules for future meetings, provide background information on possible future eel management, and set future meeting schedules.

Fisheries and Boating Services staff stressed that any recommendations for management must, at a minimum meet these guidelines: provide for long-term availability of the resource; have reporting transparency; provide no incremental costs to the Department; and any recommendation must be enforceable and easily understood. Staff also briefed the workgroup on why a free permit was necessary (provides an infrastructure for tracking harvest) and updated the workgroup on current commercial eels landings in Maryland.

Workgroup participants discussed several issues that must be addressed in future meetings. The industry discussed goals and objectives that any quota management system would need to meet. Suggested goals and objectives include:

- Protect the highliners and dedicated seasonal eel fishers (don't lose middle of the summer)
- Some protection for bait dealers
- Allow new entrants
- Fair and equitable; equitable may not mean everyone is equal
- Prolong harvest and the market through the year
- Consider the needs of the buyers
- Protect historic harvesters
- Reported harvest should be accountable/verifiable
 - Fear that bad data will lead to bad decisions

Further discussions centered on how to get the most timely landings reports. Some suggested buyer's reports could be used instead of the commercial finfish reports. The point was made that many TFL holders also have a dealer endorsement and eels destined for the New England bait market likely would not be captured in dealer reporting.

In closing, workgroup members asked staff to provide, in advance of the next meeting, more detailed harvest information such as landings by month. A tentative meeting schedule was agreed upon: December 6, 2016; January 10, 2017; and February 2, 2017. Times for all meetings would be 4-6 pm.