

Catch Shares Task Force Status Report, July 17, 2009

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This is the second report on the status of the NOAA Catch Shares Task Force. This week we launched a “Catch Shares” website that can be accessed through a link on the NMFS home page, or directly at <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/catchshares>. This website will serve as a clearinghouse for information on the Catch Shares Task Force, along with important documents and links related to catch shares issues. The webpage will continue to be developed and expanded as our work progresses.

NOAA staff has compiled the notes from the first Task Force conference call on June 30th and prepared materials and the agenda the second call held on July 16th. Summaries of the two calls are posted on the new web page. Work has also progressed on assembling background and reference materials from the literature for participants to review, including a catch shares fact sheet.

This past week another trigger question was posed to the task force. The question asked task force participants to list potential criteria that could be used for identifying suitable fisheries for the consideration of catch shares. The question stemmed from the first conference call, where several participants cited a potential benefit of providing the councils with guidance to help identify appropriate fisheries for catch share programs. The question helps address Task Force Objective 2: To make sure that councils that want to move forward with catch shares have the technical and administrative support to move quickly to design a catch share systems while empowering local fishermen to be part of the process.

To aid the ongoing efforts of the task force, a second set of catch share experts at the NOAA Fisheries and Council staff level have been identified. These volunteers from around the country have significant first-hand experience in fisheries management and catch shares. These experts will support the work of the task force in the short term, and assist the agency in the long term, as a source of individual consulting expertise. Their first task will be to contribute to a library of catch share questions and answers on the new webpage. This product will be a valuable education and outreach tool for all those who want to learn more about catch share programs.

NOAA is interested in obtaining input on catch shares from members of the commercial, recreational and environmental sectors. We are currently organizing three roundtable briefings with these groups, to be held during the week of July 20th. These sessions are anticipated to generate comments and ideas about how to move forward on catch shares issues.

Interest in the subject of catch shares is apparent at many levels. This week I participated in two Senate briefings, the first was with staff from the Senate Commerce Committee (majority and minority). The committee representatives were very interested to hear about the goals and progress of the task force and our efforts to include public input in the process. The second briefing was with staff from Senator Nelson's (FL) office where we heard about recreational sector issues and the need for broad inclusion of different perspectives from the public, commercial and recreational fishermen, and environmental organizations.