

Environment Committee:

I write to express concern over Committee Bill No. 226, An Act Authorizing Dual Landings of Fish in the State. Issue 1. As presently wording, this program would only allow harvest in excess of our state possession limit to take place from Connecticut state waters. I oppose this measure for two reasons: a. it would increase harvest in local waters, in conflict with the interests of the 150,000+ Connecticut marine anglers who are dependent on local fish abundance. b. This measure is contrary to the interests of small commercial fishing vessel ("day boat") operators as the summer seasonal quotas would be caught faster and by more and larger (most non-resident) vessels who normally fish outside state waters during the winter when possession limits are typically higher.

Issue 2. Efficient Law Enforcement. Marine fisheries laws are complex with frequent possession limit changes throughout the year. These adjustments are designed by each state to optimally manage their state quotas considering the seasonal patterns in fish prices (greatest value to fishermen), and fleet diversity - balancing the interests of small scale operators who typically fish in state waters in the summer, and larger scale operators who typically fish outside Long Island Sound in federal waters or the waters of neighboring states. This bill would require Connecticut Environmental Conservation Police to maintain daily knowledge of possession limit changes for multiple species in as many as four states. This is an impractical position at best. The singular possession limit is an essential and nearly universal tool in fisheries law enforcement and general law enforcement alike.

Commercial fisheries management in this country and around the world are grappling with serious issues of illegal and unreported harvest. Summer flounder conservation and management in particular suffers from significant levels of illegal and underreported harvest. Both bodies responsible for summer flounder management: the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council have cited: "evidence of substantial illegal harvest in recent years, especially under the Research Set-Aside program, in the form of unreported, underreported, or misreported landings, which is likely to have contributed to these patterns." "These patterns" meaning stock assessments used for quota setting persistently overestimating population size and underestimating fishing mortality when quotas are being set for the coming year - only to realize one to two years later that fish thought to still be in the population had in fact been harvested years earlier. This not only frustrates managers, but also fishermen who continually face the bad news that stocks are not rebuilding as thought and that tighter limits are once again being imposed. Ref: see Section 6.1.2.1 Summer Flounder in: <https://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/regs/2016/December/16sfsbsb2017specsea.pdf> and <http://www.asmfc.org/species/summer-flounder>.

The Research Set-aside Program referenced above was a federal program that allowed vessels to possess summer flounder in excess of state specific possession limits. The temptation this program presented lead to significant theft of summer flounder resources that was revealed only after intensive (and costly) criminal investigation. Fishermen and seafood dealers ended up engaging in a conspiracy to illegally land, and either misreport and not report those landings. This case, centered in our neighboring state of New York, involved over 590,000 pounds of summer flounder and resulted in 24 felony counts (falsification of federal records, with fraud, mail fraud, Lacey Act false labeling) against three companies and six individuals. Penalties included incarceration of three individuals for terms ranging from 4 to 12 months as well as fines and restitution totaling approximately \$2.5 million. See: [A case study of illegal, unreported summer flounder harvested under ...gfetw.org/.../Todd-Smith-NOAA-IUU-Case-Study-Summer-Flounder-under-RSA-Pro...](http://www.gfetw.org/.../Todd-Smith-NOAA-IUU-Case-Study-Summer-Flounder-under-RSA-Pro...)

We have many good, honest people in our commercial fishing fleet, but they need protection from those less scrupulous who would (and have) engaged in illegal landing and misreporting practices. Complex multi-state possession limits would provide a tempting opportunity to possess and land fish illegally. And, as we learned from the Research Set-aside case - only intensive, costly investigative law enforcement could uncover. Such resources are in scarce supply in today's budget climate.

I urge Legislators to allow DEEP to continue to work closely with our fishermen, using flexible but readily enforceable tools, including common sense possession limits that protect both honest operators and a prized public resource. One boat - one limit.

Thank you.
David Simpson