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Subject: [EXTERNAL] : Whelk Minimum Size
Date: Tuesday, May 19, 2020 3:09:35 PM

To Whom It May Concern:

Would it be possible to add the proposed changes to the whelk minimum size to the agenda for the upcoming May 27th Shellfish Advisory Panel meeting? This change has the potential to have a significant effect on the whelk industry and needs to be discussed by the industry representatives on the SAP before it goes in front of the RIMFC.

While I support the proposed change to measuring whelk by height, as it is a more repeatable measurement less susceptible to error compared to measuring width, I do NOT agree that a height gauge of 2-9/32 inches results in a 2% gain in available harvest compared to the current size limit. In the days after the workshop on this matter I experimented with multiple height gauges and measured whelk from all over the east and west passages of Narragansett Bay. I found that all whelks I measured to be at or just greater than 3-inches wide will easily pass through a 2-9/32 inch height gauge. I even made a 2-1/4 inch height gauge to test if that would be closer to equivalent to the current size limit and even this smaller size height gauge resulted in nearly all 3-3-1/16 inch wide currently keeper sized whelk measuring as undersized.

There must be a discrepancy between how height was measured in RI DEM's sea sampling data and using a 2-9/32 inch height gauge as proposed in option 2. It is absolutely false to say that a height gauge of 2-9/32 inches results in a gain in harvest, in reality, a height gauge of 2-9/32 inches results in a significant loss in available harvest in the range of 5 to 10% or more. It would be an effective increase in the size limit for whelk.

I made a video to illustrate this. All gauges used in this video have been verified with digital calipers and width was measured with the operculum opening facing down. The width measuring device (white) has 2 vertical walls that are 3.01 or 3.02 inches apart and is what I use daily to check the size of my whelk. The first height gauge is 2-9/32 inches tall and is marked with 9/32. The second height gauge I use is 2-1/4 inches tall and is marked 1/4. Below is an icloud link that should lead to the video. Please let me know if the video does not work I will look into alternatives.

<https://share.icloud.com/photos/0pfyW0zYnXJ3C0NIWyJFCUa2g> [[share.icloud.com](#)]

In the video I first measure the width of each whelk. When the opposing shell edges touch both vertical walls of the device (with the operculum opening facing down) with the columella axis parallel to center, this is a 3-inch wide whelk. All whelks shown in the video measure at 3-inch or slightly greater than 3-inch width. All of these currently

legal size whelks easily pass through the 2-9/32 inch height gauge. They even pass through the smaller 2-1/4 inch height gauge. This indicates that in order for a height gauge to be equivalent to the current size limit it must be smaller than 2-1/4 inches. By my estimation something in the range of 2-3/16 to 2-7/32 inch height would be roughly equivalent to 3-inch width.

I am opposed to any effective increase in the whelk minimum size as the current 3-inch width is more than sufficient to protect the whelk population from overfishing. Any gauge size increase above this will result in the fishery moving away from maximum sustainable yield. Additionally, taking ecosystem effects into account, whelk's role as a predator of bay quahogs should be considered. The quahog beds of Narragansett Bay are inundated with massive population densities of channeled whelk, and at the current size limit whelk fishermen are unable to decrease the population of these predators in quahog beds. Any minimum size increase will be a detriment to the bay quahog industry as well as the whelk industry.

In conclusion I propose that the whelk size limit stay **status quo** for 2020 with continued discussion and collaboration between whelk fishermen and RIDEM to develop a height gauge this is NOT an effective minimum size increase over the current 3-inch width. I do not support option 1. Removing the length measurement without going to a equivalent height measurement does not help the industry.

Thank you for your consideration,
Ken Murgo
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SAP Whelk Industry Representative