



PRESS RELEASE

Recreational Fishing Alliance

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NEW POTS OFF REEF BILL MOVES IN ASSEMBLY RFA-NJ Supports New Legislation To Address Fixed Gear Issue

The New Jersey Assembly Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee voted this week to move forward Assembly legislation which would remove commercial gear from 99% of deployed reef materials on New Jersey's two inshore artificial reefs.

The Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA) and the RFA-NJ board are supportive of the legislation calling it a win for recreational anglers who fish at the Sandy Hook and Axel Carlson reef sites where deployed commercial finfish, lobster and conch pots have created an access problem in recent years.

"When you consider that this bill would limit gear to 1% of the deployed reef materials on our two state reefs, clearing 99% of the state's deployed reef materials at both Axel Carlson and Sandy Hook, I'd say this is a pretty big win for New Jersey saltwater anglers," said RFA-NJ Chairman Capt. Adam Nowalsky.

The RFA also noted that this particular legislation (A2645) is also the first step in a regulatory process which will hopefully remove all fixed gear from New Jersey's remaining artificial reef sites from Shark River and Sea Girt south to the Cape May and Deepwater reef sites.

In the Asbury Park Press today, Nowalsky said RFA-NJ's board is supportive of the concept of the bill, but he also maintained that there are some issues that need to be addressed, such as what specific areas along one of the corners of the reefs will be allowed for commercial usage.

"We support Assembly Albano's efforts to hear a bill in his committee and we look forward to a companion Senate bill and a reconciliation of the two bills. The most important thing is we've got things moving again. The reef program is of utmost importance to the state's anglers."

A-2645 would prohibit fixed gear from approximately 90% of New Jersey's two inshore artificial reefs located off Monmouth County; the other smaller 10% geographic area which would allow fixed gear have historically been used by generations of lobster potters. During the prime fishing season of May 15 to October 1, fish pots would be prohibited from the entire reef areas.

The legislation also directs the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) to take action to modify the Artificial Reef Program grants, if necessary, to comply with use of federal funding. The legislation would also initiate a pot management plan in the state to prompt NJDEP to take accounting and accountability measures as to the number of fish pots presently deployed - and by whom - in New Jersey coastal waters

Capt. Nowalsky said the RFA-NJ board of directors discussed the legislation at length on Wednesday night and took a position in support of A-2645. "While RFA-NJ has held the position of no pots on our state reefs, we believe the benefits of this legislation are significant enough to move it forward," he said. Testimony from former state Reef Coordinator Bill Figley in support of the bill, provided it restores funding to the reef program, bolstered the Board's position.

"This bill gives 90% of Axel Carlson and Sandy Hook reefs exclusively to hook and line fishing and it gives the state the ability to pursue special management zone designation for the other 13 artificial reef sites along our coast," Nowalsky added.

RFA-NJ is also confident that the legislation will once again allow the NJDEP to make use of Sport Fish Restoration Funds from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for reef deployment. According to the Asbury Park Press, USFWS chief Dr. John Organ said he was currently reviewing the legislation, but noted that federal funding for New Jersey's restoration programs has not been reduced nor removed, only that federal money designated for the state cannot be used for the state's artificial reef program.

Although attempts to build ocean reefs off New Jersey began in 1935, it wasn't until 1984 that the State of New Jersey initiated a Reef Program administered by the NJDEP to build reefs along the coast. Two of the 15 reef sites - Axel Carlson and Sandy Hook - are located within state waters, the other 13 artificial reef sites designated as being deployed in federal waters.

"This has been a long, drawn-out battle but this legislation will finally open up the process by which the regional fisheries council can implement a special management zone for our other reef sites," said RFA executive director Jim Donofrio. "From the hearing this week, some of the leading activists and organizers in the New Jersey artificial reef program including former reef director Bill Figley are supportive of this concept in Assembly effort, so that alone tells me this is a good deal for anglers, and something to support moving forward."

"Also of major importance in this particular bill is the language concerning an NJDEP pot management plan which would address the proliferation of fish pots and fixed gear on all other snags and lumps in New Jersey coastal waters not designated part of the state's artificial reef complex," Donofrio said.

"Not only will this legislation immediately clear 99% of the material on those two artificial reef sites of fixed gear, it will also address what happens to that gear when it's deployed in other state coastal waters," Donofrio added

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The Recreational Fishing Alliance is a national, grassroots political action organization representing recreational fishermen and the recreational fishing industry on marine fisheries issues. RFA's Mission is to safeguard the rights of saltwater anglers, protect marine, boat and tackle industry jobs, and ensure the long-term sustainability of our Nation's saltwater fisheries. For more information, call 888-JOIN-RFA or visit www.joinrfa.org.