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**NOAA FISHERIES HOLDS PUBLIC MEETINGS ON
ATLANTIC STRIPED BASS MANAGEMENT**

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) is considering a recommendation from the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission to reopen federal waters (from three to 200 miles offshore) for recreational and commercial striped bass fishing. Federal managers of Atlantic striped bass are holding public meetings from Nov. 5 to Dec. 10 in New England and Mid-Atlantic states so the public can help identify the scope of issues surrounding striped bass fisheries as the agency begins to prepare an environmental impact analysis of potential revisions to the regulations. NOAA Fisheries is an agency of the Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

"I encourage the public to participate in these meetings," said William Hogarth, director of NOAA Fisheries. "We are asking for specific recommendations and information, so please come and advise us of issues we should be aware of for our analyses as we consider potential revision to the management of this important fishery."

NOAA Fisheries closed the striped bass fishery in federal waters in 1990 to rebuild the stock, which was restored in 1995. In the letter forwarding its recommendation, the Commission notes that allowing fishermen to land striped bass that are caught in federal waters as bycatch would reduce wasteful discards. The Commission also points out that commercial fishing is capped by an annual quota and the fishery would close as soon as the quota is reached, regardless of whether the fish were caught in state or federal waters. In addition, monitoring requirements of the fishery management plan would allow quick response if fishing restrictions are warranted in the future.

Anyone affected by or interested in Atlantic striped bass management in federal waters is invited to participate in the scoping meetings.

NOAA Fisheries' notice of intent to develop an EIS for Atlantic Striped Bass and the scoping document are available online at www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/state_federal/state_federal.htm. Written comments must be received no later than Dec. 22, 2003. Send comments to: Anne Lange, Chief, State-Federal Fisheries Division, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, NOAA Fisheries, 1315 East West Highway, Room 13317, Silver Spring, MD 20910; or by fax to (301) 713-0596.

Listed below is the schedule and locations for the public meetings:

- Wednesday, Nov. 5, 2003 - Portsmouth, NH, 7-8:30 p.m.
Urban Forestry Center
45 Elwin Road
Portsmouth, NH 03801
- Wednesday, Nov. 12, 2003 - Manteo, NC, 7-9 p.m.
North Carolina Aquarium on Roanoke Island
374 Airport Road
Manteo, NC 27954
- Tuesday, Nov. 18, 2003 -Toms River, NJ, 6-9 p.m.
Quality Inn
815 Route 37
Toms River, NJ 08755
- Wednesday, Nov. 19, 2003 - Dover, DE, 6:30-7:30 p.m.
Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control
Richardson & Robbins Bldg.
89 Kings Highway
Dover, DE
- Monday, Dec. 1, 2003 - Stony Brook, NY, 7:30-9:30 p.m.
State University of New York at Stony Brook (SUNY)
Student Activities Center
Nicolls Road
Stony Brook, NY 11794
- Tuesday, Dec. 2, 2003 - Old Lyme, CT, 7-9 p.m.
Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, Marine Headquarters
Boating Education Building
333 Ferry Road
Old Lyme, CT 06371
- Monday, Dec. 8, 2003 - Portland, ME, 7-9 p.m.
Holiday Inn By The Bay
88 Spring Street
Portland, ME 04101

- Tuesday, Dec. 9, 2003- Bourne, MA, 7-10 p.m.
Canal Club
100 Trowbridge Road
Bourne, MA 02532
- Wednesday, Dec. 10, 2003 - Narragansett, RI, 7-9 p.m.
University of Rhode Island, Bay Campus
Corless Auditorium
South Ferry Road
Narragansett, RI

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

The Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources.

On the Internet:

NOAA - <http://www.noaa.gov>

NOAA Fisheries - <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>