

Fishermen's Ecological Knowledge (FEK) Meeting May 10, 2022 4:30-6:00p

Meeting Notes

Outcomes of Meeting

1. Further develop community within the group towards completing coordinated projects/research
2. Identify 1-2 projects from list that the FEK group can plan/tackle starting summer/fall 2022

Attendees

Al Eagles (Fisherman)	Lanny Delinger (Fisherman)
Bill Sieczkiewicz (Fisherman)	Leland Macey (URI)
Carol Thornber (URI)	Madeleine Hall Arber (MIT)
Conor McManus (RIDEM)	Mike Potter (URI)
Corinne Truesdale (RIDEM)	Nicole Flecchia (URI)
Dave Borkman (RIDEM)	Riley Secor (URI)
David Bethoney (CFRF)	Sawyer Balint (EPA)
Jim Hagy (EPA)	Susan Ingles (CFRF)
Joe Haberek (RIDEM)	Wally Fulweiler (Boston U)
Katie Viducic (CFRF)	Courtney Schmidt (NBEP)

Notes

Courtney opened the meeting with introductions and a review of the "[Commercial Fishermen's Observations of Ecological Change in Narragansett Bay](#)" pilot project and the resulting December 9th [webinar](#). The report, webinar, and facilitated discussion showed interest from all parties to explore this topic further.

Using the [summary and outline for next steps](#) from the pilot project and December webinar, the meeting covered three tracks to explore:

1. Continued regular collection and synthesis of FEK;
2. A short-term "joint fact-finding" initiative to establish shared understandings and objectives among commercial fishing, scientific, and management audiences; and
3. Ongoing efforts to provide for engagement of scientists and fishermen in collaborative research to better understand the changes occurring in the Narragansett Bay ecosystem.

Regular collection of FEK requires a social scientist to lead the effort. Annual and seasonal surveys and periodic open-ended interviews could be used to gather observations depending on the goal of the collection. Annual and seasonal surveys would gather information on shorter time scales and could create a cohort of fishermen who participate multiple times per year. The open-ended interviews could bring context to the shorter-term interviews and explore trends on longer time

horizons. These studies could focus on different gear types, places in the bay, times of year, etc.

The attendees asked questions that could be relevant to surveys given to the fishermen. These include questions on how the industry is changing and understanding why younger people are not joining the industry as they once were. Additionally, surveys could also explore creating “new” fisheries with species that are new to area and figure out how best to create a fishery that works with the changing ecosystem. The working group agreed that a social scientist could help create field data sheets to collect more than the classic bio-physical data (such as type, color, weather, etc.) to understand what fishermen are seeing at that moment.

A joint fact-finding initiative enables the construction of mutually credible understanding of what is taking place in Narragansett Bay. Those involved would work together to develop the participants, ground rules, goals, and timelines for the project. While the group was interested in this, no joint fact-finding projects were suggested. It is thought that joint fact-finding techniques would be used for all projects stemming from this working group.

The working group spent much of the meeting discussing several collaborative research ideas including: understanding water clarity throughout the bay; attaching dissolved oxygen sensors to crab pots to provide near-real-time data with an extensive spatial coverage; understanding the extent of fouling organisms throughout the bay; monitoring seaweed throughout the bay; and finally crating a program to monitoring the “unmonitored” shellfish and create partnerships with other groups (such as CFRF’s Shellfish Research Fleet).

Other topics brought up by the group include a focus on the benthic community of Narragansett Bay. Specifically, the group discussed predation on and recruitment of quahogs, fouling of organisms on traps, and the changes of seaweed species and extent. The larger discussion of the effects of excess nitrogen reduction on the ecosystem is ever-present, and many researchers are adding new research to the discussion. One researcher is Dr. Neils Hobbs from URI who has done a study on fouling organisms in the bay. Another, Dr. Carol Thornber (URI), has also studied seaweed and is interested in understanding the fishermen’s concerns with species and extent. These are projects that could be expanded on with the fishermen’s help.

Finally, the group decided that more meetings could include webinars or in-person sessions to explore new studies (such as Dr. Neils Hobb’s fouling study), how regulations and policies are created and enforced (such as a discussion on discharge permits). Additionally, field trips to local wastewater treatment facilities to understand water treatment processes, or field trips with local fishermen or aquaculture farms to understand what a “day in the life” of a fisherman looks like could bring unity and more facts for any future joint fact-finding projects.

Action Items

Action items identified during the meeting:

- NBEP to contract with Boston University for assistance on a project this summer
- NBEP and Boston U to refine project ideas based on May meeting notes and develop scopes of work for the project(s)
- Create and share opportunities with fishermen, CFRF, and others to gather data and data collectors