

Testimony of Roland Lewis, President and CEO  
Before the Waterfronts Committee of the New York City Council  
October 3, 2007

“All the Angles: Fishing in New York Harbor-Consumption, Conservation, and Commercial  
Fishing.”

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

**Access**

From land or water, finding safe convenient places to fish in New York City is continuing and unnecessary challenge. A commercial fishing boat based in Sheepshead Bay can not use the berths at Pier 11 or at the World Financial Center for instance. In fact of arduous security regulations and the general shrinking supply of piers and docks, there is almost no place for a fishing boat to pick up willing anglers on the Island of Manhattan. Ironically, there are certainly many empty ferry boroughs that are empty on weekends – the prime time for recreational fisherman. The same dynamic hold true for the outer boroughs as well. Even fishing from the land is made difficult in New York. On average there is one fishing pier per 100,000 residents. In New Jersey the ratio is one fishing pier per 25,000 residents. With over 500 miles of waterfront New Yorkers must make do with one fishing pier per every 5 linear miles.

**Consumption**

The catch of the day in our waterways should be safe enough to eat. Unfortunately in many areas it is not.

A recent study by the Mt. Sinai School of Medicine found that more than 20,000 residents of New York City eat fish caught in city waters every week. According to our research, there are 70 known spots around the city where these anglers cast their line or drop their crab traps into the water. Whether or not these folks know whether or not the fish is healthy enough to eat or how to safely prepare it is an open question.

We recommend that information signage be posted at these 70 locations in English and Spanish, and in certain areas like Flushing Bay or Sheepshead Bay that mandarin and Russian notices also be posted.

## **Conservation**

Part of the complexity in ensuring safe fishing practices in our area is the differences and inconsistencies in the rules of each state. For instance, New York does not allow the catch or consumption of summer flounder, where in New Jersey, you can take up to 8 fish larger than 17 inches during the season which extends from May 26 to September 10. In New Jersey, catching blue crabs from anywhere around Newark Bay is flat out not allowed. And this is a good thing, because the Newark Bay has become a repository for huge volumes of dioxin, a by-product of the Agent Orange manufacturing along the Passaic River decades ago. But if you find yourself along the northerly or westerly shore of Staten Island, just a hundred or so yards from Newark Bay, fishing for blue crabs is entirely legal under New York State Law.

Conservation requires that the agencies in our region develop an integrated approach to fisheries management, and that we continue to clean up the sources of pollution which make many of our fish species unhealthy to eat.

## **Commercial Fishing**

Our fisheries represent a significant portion of our waterfront economy, both in terms of the harvest of commercial fishermen, their sale at market like Fulton Fish market at Hunts Point, and

their consumption by everyday people like us. The operation of every one of those vessels also represents an unheralded segment of our economy, as the mechanics and engineers who work below decks, and Captains and crew above deck all support their families. Just as the city and state are investing in new parks and waterfronts at Hunts Point, the East River, Governors Island and the Hudson River, so we can seek to increase the economic capacity of these areas to support boating and fishing.

Two years ago the City of Chicago conducted a study which found that boating in that city has an economic impact of more than \$230 million each year and it is rapidly growing. Given the wealth of educational resources we offer here, whether the Maritime Technology Program at Kingsborough Community College, the New York Harbor High School in Bushwick, and even the advanced academies at SUNY Maritime and Kings Point, these educational and training programs add to our competitive advantage as a great place to grow boat-based businesses.

We would be happy to partner with the Council and our new “Waterfront Works” task force to better understand the economic contributions made by these industries and, most importantly, how we can grow them so to help diversify and strengthen our overall economy

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