



Helping Fisheries-Dependent Businesses Cope with VHS Impacts

The acronym VHS stands for viral hemorrhagic septicemia - a serious viral disease that causes mortalities in wild and hatchery-raised fish. The discovery of a new strain of the VHS virus (VHSV genotype IVb) in the Great Lakes prompted the federal Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to implement stringent regulations restricting live fish transport across state and international boundaries. Unfortunately, these regulations designed to protect wild fish have created unintentional economic hardships for fisheries-dependent businesses, such as fish processors and bait harvesters.

As of April 2007, New York State businesses were restricted from transporting live, high-quality bullheads from a Canadian commercial netter to New York where the fish are processed and sold. Bullhead dinners are a popular menu item for restaurants and a source of revenue for not-for-profit organizations. The economic impact of VHS on this bullhead market is more than \$170,000 annually. Although a limited commercial bullhead fishery exists in Lake Ontario, it cannot meet restaurant demand.

Because of this economic impact, New York Sea Grant organized a meeting with APHIS, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, fish disease experts, and representatives of U.S. Senator Hillary Clinton, Congressman John McHugh, NY Senator James Wright, and NY Assembly members Diedre



*Brown Bullhead are a popular dinner menu item for New York restaurants and not-for-profit organizations.
Photo: J. Scarola, New Hampshire Fish & Game Department*

Scozzafava and Darrel Aubertine. The meeting was designed to find middle ground that would protect the fisheries while allowing businesses to stay afloat.

As direct results of the meeting,

- NY fish processors were able to locate sources of emergency, low-interest loans,
- NY fish processors were able to identify a Canadian processor to supply them with fresh processed bullhead, but at a 50 percent loss,
- NY Sea Grant developed an effective euthanization procedure that would allow the NY processors to transport Canadian fish to New York plants for processing and sale, and
- leadership by Senator Clinton and Congressman McHugh led to the timely issuance of less stringent VHS regulations related to bait fisheries. The revised regulations allowed bait harvesters located adjacent to their bait sources at risk of going out of business to continue to sell bait.

*New York Sea Grant is a cooperative program of the State University of New York and Cornell University.
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