CAPE MAY, NJ - This year’s auction of research set-aside (RSA) quota by the National Fisheries Institute-Scientific Monitoring Committee (NFI-SMC) will be held on Dec. 18.

Starting at 10 am that day, NFI-SMC Chairman Dan Cohen will auction off the harvest rights to approximately 2,211 million pounds of RSA quota to members of the organization. That’s nearly twice as much as was available in 2005 due in large part to a significant increase in the Loligo squid RSA poundage available.

Specifically, the RSA species and amounts that will be auctioned are:
- Summer flounder - 309,711 pounds;
- Black sea bass - 119,358 pounds;
- Scup - 221,581 pounds;
- Loligo squid - 1,193,099 pounds; and
- Bluefish - 363,677 pounds.

These RSA quotas were “set aside” by the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council and subsequently awarded to NFI-SMC for cooperative research projects by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS).

This is the fifth year NFI-SMC has conducted the auction via conference call. Anyone who wants to participate must join the organization and pay their 2007 dues by Dec. 11, 2006.

RSA quota can be harvested and landed outside of regular trip limits and seasons.

“Those boats that won the scup quota in the 2003 to 2006 auctions were able to wait until the seasons were closed or the trip limits restricted, and their fish was worth substantially more in the market,” Cohen said.

Cooperative research
NFI-SMC will use the money raised through dues, contributions, and this year’s auction to fund its ongoing Mid-Atlantic Supplemental Finfish Survey, a Loligo squid net testing study, and a discard mortality study of summer flounder in the bottom trawl fishery.

The supplemental finfish study, which is now in its fourth year, enables industry, in cooperation with NMFS, to conduct trawl surveys in times, depths, and areas that augment NMFS’s annual spring and fall surveys. Data from the supplemental survey are now being used in some stock assessments conducted by scientists at the NMFS Northeast Fisheries Science Center.

The Loligo net testing project will compare the current legal codend and a codend comprised of meshes less than 2.5” to gauge the effectiveness of the smaller mesh at reducing the capture of small, unmarketable squid.

Cornell Cooperative Extension developed the summer flounder discard mortality study and received the RSA award from NMFS.

“NFI-SMC is helping them turn the set-aside quota awarded them into dollars to support their research project,” the committee explained.

$1.5 million so far
NFI-SMC formed in 1997 in response to a lack of congressional funding for Mid-Atlantic cooperative research.

Since then, fishermen, docks, processors, and support companies have contributed more than $1.5 million to fund the organization’s cooperative research and scientific monitoring projects.

Cohen explained that the RSA auction generates funds that NFI-SMC then uses to help “make the ‘best available science’ better.”

In addition to money raised during the auction, the organization relies on contributions and dues from member boats, docks, processors, and even individual captains who contribute whenever they can afford to.

Contributions per year have ranged from $250 for a small gillnetter up to $10,000 for the larger docks and processors.

“When we pay for observers and fuel to conduct cooperative supplemental finfish surveys or test gear, every recreational and commercial fisherman in the Atlantic benefits,” Cohen said.

More info
NFI-SMC membership dues are one-half of one percent of a boat’s gross stock of Mid-Atlantic species up to $2,000 per year. Captains who contribute more than $1,000 to the NFI-SMC will be eligible to bid on the full lot of each species.

After all full lots are auctioned, a separate auction will follow for vessels that have contributed $499-$999.99 to NFI-SMC. These vessels will be eligible to bid on smaller lots. The auction rules will be finalized just prior to the auction date.

Checks for dues should be made payable to NFI-SMC and mailed to: NFI-SMC, 1636 Delaware Ave., Cape May, NJ 08204, attention Greg DiDomenico.

For more information, call DiDomenico at (609) 898-1100. /cfn/