



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

Environmental Protection and Restoration
Environmental Education

House Bill 1397

Recreational Striped Bass Fishery – Study on Harvest Data

DATE: MARCH 4, 2020

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation SUPPORTS House Bill 1397 to conduct a study on methods to be used to obtain improved harvest data for the striped bass recreational fishery. HB 1397 directs the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to complete a study on methods and feasibility of improving harvest data by December 2020.

A recent assessment of striped bass populations indicated that fishing rates are too high and fish are being removed faster than they can be replaced.¹ At the direction of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, an interstate cooperative management body that oversees striped bass, Maryland agreed to an 18 percent reduction in harvest in 2020 to try to stem this decline.²

To develop regulations to achieve the 18 percent reduction, Maryland relied on state-level data from the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) to determine the number of fish harvested by recreational anglers. While these numbers are relatively reliable at a coastwide scale, when parsed into state-level estimates, the data are no longer considered suitable for management use.³ Unfortunately, DNR chose to rely on the state-level estimates to develop recreational fishing regulations for 2020. This calls into question whether the validity of the analyses that form the basis of the regulations and whether the regulations themselves will be effective in protecting striped bass.

Striped bass are an iconic species in the Chesapeake Bay and Maryland's state fish, a designation that reflects not only its cultural foundation and value to Maryland fisheries, but also its biological connection to Maryland's waters. Chesapeake Bay striped bass spawning areas and nursery habitat account for more than 70 percent of the coastal migratory striped bass population. Striped bass are highly prized by recreational anglers, who contribute \$767 million in economic output and support more than 5,000 Maryland jobs annually.⁴

HB 1397 directs DNR to determine if it is possible, and more importantly, feasible, to develop a more reliable state survey or analysis for state-specific recreational harvest data. This determination should guide DNR in appropriate use of data for preservation of striped bass populations.

For these reasons, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation recommends a FAVORABLE report on HB 1397 from the Environment and Transportation Committee. Please contact Dr. Allison Colden at acolden@cbf.org or 443-482-2160 with any questions.

¹ Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC). 2019. 66th Northeast Regional Stock Assessment Workshop (66th SAW) Assessment Report. US Dept Commerce, Northeast Fish Sci Cent Ref Doc. 19-08. 1170 p.

² Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. 2019. Addendum VI to Amendment 6 to the Atlantic Striped Bass Interstate Fishery Management Plan. https://www.asmfc.org/uploads/file/5dd447baStripedBassAddendumVI_Amend6_Oct2019.pdf

³ Personal communication from the National Marine Fisheries Service, Fisheries Statistics Division, January 21, 2020.

⁴ Southwick Associates. 2019. Economic Contributions of Recreational Fishing. <https://asafishing.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/ASA-Congressional-Fishing-Econtributions-Report-2019-01-31.pdf>

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