



2/27/2024

To: Honorable Members of the Senate Education, Energy & Environment Committee

Re: Senate Bill 1053/House Bill 1238 - Fisheries - Striped Bass - Closed Seasons

Position: **Unfavorable**

We the leaders of the undersigned organizations representing Maryland's angling and boating community oppose, and respectfully request an **unfavorable report for SB1053/HB1238**.

This bill prohibits a person from catching or attempting to catch striped bass (i.e., a catch and release closure) in the Chesapeake Bay and its tidal tributaries from March 1<sup>st</sup> – May 15<sup>th</sup>, unless a "trophy season" is established by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MD DNR) in the same year.

We collectively oppose SB1053/HB1238 because this proposed action:

- Sidesteps the public and long standing science-based regulatory process for managing striped bass
- Lacks scientifically justified conservation benefits
- Inflicts significant seasonal economic impacts on small recreational fishing and boating businesses in Maryland
- Undermines longstanding efforts by the recreational fishing and boating community to educate anglers on best fish-handling practices for responsible catch-and-release fishing.

At this time, Maryland's existing science-based closures already adequately address fishing mortality, including catch and release, during the rockfish spawning season. The existing closures align with the known timing of the complete spawning season. For example, all fishing (including catch and release) has been prohibited since 1990 in known spawning areas from March 1st to June 1st, ensuring the protection of fish spawning in tributaries.

In other words, the existing closures already provide necessary spawning protection focused specifically on when and where spawning occurs. Recent scientific studies show that existing closures are already protecting the entire spawning run. Giuliano (2023) examined Maryland spawning data from 1985 to 2020, concluding that while spawning was not occurring earlier, it was ending earlier over time because of climate shifts. Hence, the current closures effectively maximize the protection of actively spawning fish because the spawning season is shortening while spawning closures have been expanding via the

closure of the spring trophy fishery and associated catch and release closures implemented by DNR in 2024.<sup>1</sup>

For example, the catch and release closures proposed in SB1053/HB1238 would save few fish because March is not a popular fishing month because of cold weather, and the survival of released fish is good because the water temperature is also cold and holds lots of dissolved oxygen. Even if these March savings were necessary, there are less impactful ways to achieve them. For example, MD DNR's own estimates demonstrate that a 3-day closure in July or August would save more fish than SB1053/HB1238. In other words, a three-day closure in July or August would save more fish than closing the entire month of March to catch and release fishing.<sup>2</sup> Evaluating these types of trade-offs is the entire reason the DNR rulemaking process exists.

America's anglers and boaters have consistently played an integral role in the science-based conservation of our shared natural resources especially for striped bass. The recreational fishing and boating industry continues to work collaboratively to develop materials that educate anglers on best handling techniques for successful catch-and release-fishing.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, anglers and boaters have directly contributed millions of dollars through licensing fees and excise taxes established by the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund on fishing equipment and boat fuel. In 2023 alone, \$424 million was apportioned to the states to fund fishery conservation programs. This resulted in \$4.24 million in funds for conservation programs specifically in Maryland, funded solely by anglers and boaters.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, we urge you to reject SB1053/HB1238 and uphold science-based management practices for Maryland striped bass. Establishing sound, science-based management solutions that are properly vetted through impacted stakeholders is imperative for supporting the valuable livelihoods of small fishing and boating businesses in Maryland.

Sincerely,  
Glenn Hughes  
Annapolis, Maryland  
President  
American Sportfishing Association

David Sikorski  
Baltimore, Maryland  
Executive Director  
Coastal Conservation Association Maryland

David Dickerson  
Annapolis, Maryland  
VP- State Government Affairs  
National Marine Manufacturers Association

Chad Tokowicz  
Baltimore, Maryland  
Government Relations Manager  
Marine Retailers Association of the Americas

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<sup>1</sup> <https://news.maryland.gov/dnr/2024/02/09/maryland-enacts-striped-bass-emergency-regulations-to-increase-protections-for-the-spawning-population/>

<sup>2</sup> [See pdf page 161 – Maryland DNR Atlantic Striped Bass Addendum VI Implementation Plan.](#)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.fishtalkmag.com/blog/trophy-spring-rockfish-catch-and-release>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.fws.gov/media/fy-23-sfr-final-apportionment-table>