



2/27/2024

To: Honorable Members of the House Environment & Transportation Committee

Re: 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 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 1st – May 15th, unless a "trophy season" is established by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MD DNR) in the same year.

We collectively oppose 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 2024.¹

For example, the catch and release closures proposed in 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

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

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 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.² 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.³ 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.⁴

Therefore, we urge you to reject 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
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David Dickerson
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National Marine Manufacturers Association

Chad Tokowicz
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Government Relations Manager
Marine Retailers Association of the Americas

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

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

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

RECREATIONAL BOATING

Impact in Maryland



\$4.2 BILLION

ANNUAL ECONOMIC IMPACT¹

(Includes direct, indirect and induced spending)

16,871

Jobs supported¹
(Direct and indirect)

1,088

Businesses supported¹
(Direct)

172,091

Registered boats²

\$495.8 M

Annual new boat, engine, trailer, and accessory sales²

RECREATIONAL BOATING IN AMERICA



95% of boats sold in the U.S. are **MADE IN THE U.S.**²



61% of boat owners have an annual household income of **\$75,000 OR LESS**³

93% of U.S. boat manufacturers are **SMALL BUSINESSES**¹



95% of boats are towable boats **SMALLER THAN 26 FT.**²





Economic Contributions of Recreational Fishing

— Maryland —

749,600 anglers spent \$514.3 Million while fishing in Maryland.

Statewide Contributions by Anglers in Maryland



\$803.7 Million
Economic Output



5,160
Jobs Supported

National Contributions by U.S. Anglers

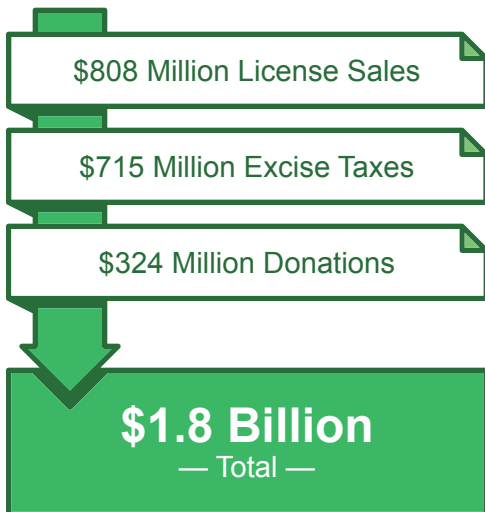


\$148 Billion
Economic Output

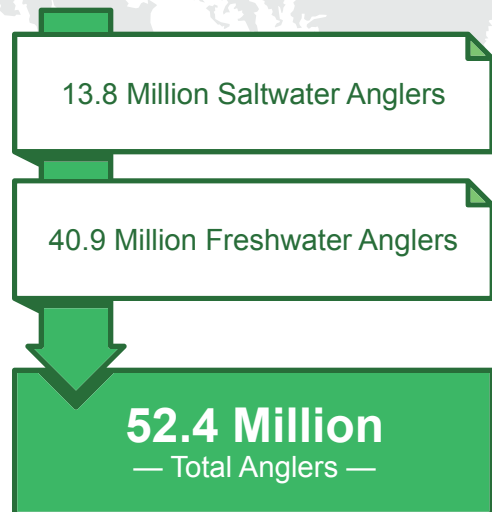


945,500
Jobs Supported

Annual U.S. Angler Contributions to Conservation



U.S. Anglers by the Numbers



Angler participation and spending presented here reflect 2021 estimates.