



*Ensuring the health and conservation of our marine resources
and anglers' access to them*

3/6/2024

To: Honorable Delegate Marc Korman, Chair
Honorable Delegate Regina T. Boyce, Vice Chair
Honorable Members of the House Environment & Transportation Committee

Re: House Bill 1232 - Fisheries - Striped Bass or Rockfish - Juvenile Survey

Position: **Favorable with Amendments**

House Bill 1232 would expand the scope of the annual Young of Year (YOY) survey aka: Juvenile Abundance Index. (JAI).

As anglers, and avid users of our natural resources, CCA Maryland members work hard to promote sensible science-based management measures to support sustainable fisheries for the benefit of the general public, and the long-term health of the Chesapeake Bay. For this reason, we have a long standing record of supporting the further analysis of fishery resources through robust data collection, and provide our general support of the concept introduced by House Bill 1232.

As one of the longest standing surveys for striped bass and other valued species in the Bay, the YOY/JAI provides an important view to compare each year to the next, but not provide a direct determination of population levels or overall abundance in the Chesapeake Bay. Other surveys and sampling by the Department of Natural Resources(DNR) and partner states, agencies and academics support additional understandings of fish abundance, growth rates, etc. throughout the year and life cycles of the fish. This is done throughout the Chesapeake and the range of important species like striped bass, and all support the science based assessment of the species.

Recognizing the concerns that many have related to invasive species, range changes and expansions of some species, habitat changes, and other climate related impacts to fisheries management, we recommend the following general changes to this legislation:

- Asking DNR to identify science and research priorities to support state, regional and coastwide fishery management plans for striped bass and other ecologically or economically important species.
- Asking DNR to identify a potential timeline and fiscal requirements of any prioritized plans and returns on investment in research or data for any specific actions when possible.
- Implementation of recommendations from the Recreational Fishing Data Collection & Licensing Task Force created by legislation in 2022, and delivered to General Assembly leaders, the Governor and DNR on Dec. 1, 2022. (full report available @ ccamd.org/data)

For these reasons, we respectfully offer that amending HB 1232 or identifying a pathway forward to implement additional research and science priorities may better serve the collective goals. The additional JAI/YOY sites required by this bill may provide improved understanding of striped bass abundance, but may not be the most important science priority of DNR at this time, as there is no guarantee that additional surveys will be suitable for improving current fisheries management plans.

In conclusion, CCA Maryland enthusiastically supports improving our overall scientific knowledge of living resources in the Chesapeake Bay, and improved capacity at DNR to better assess our most valued species. Doing so should also provide additional stakeholder engagement and opportunity for advancing our collective understanding of balancing access and sustainability for our shared public resources.

For further discussion regarding this important matter, please contact CCA Maryland Executive Director, David Sikorski – (443)621-9186 – david@ccamd.org