

March 8, 2023

To the Maryland Senate Education, Energy and Environment Committee

Currently, the Virginia-based menhaden fishery is very likely overfishing the stock of Atlantic Menhaden in and around the Chesapeake Bay, which is preventing this important forage fish from making its way into the bay and its tributaries. As the base an important prey item for many important species in the bay, such as Striped Bass and Osprey, the disappearance of most of the menhaden from the bay is contributing to the disappearance of many species that rely on menhaden. Furthermore, Striped Bass have had 4 terrible reproductive years in a row and the lower levels of menhaden (i.e., their favorite, energy-rich and dense prey) in the bay are very likely a contributing factor. Instead of foraging on Menhaden, an absence of these fish means striped bass and predators need to rely more on blue crabs, white perch, and other prey items that are not as easy to consume in large quantities. This means striped bass need to likely spend more energy searching and acquiring prey, so they need even more prey to support them and their reproductive efforts, leading to reduced reproductive output. Therefore, a decline in menhaden is very problematic for many predators in the Chesapeake, including our state fish.

Virginia has been allotted about 75% of the entire Atlantic Coast's quota, which is a drastically disproportionate amount relative to its coastline. Additionally, much of their harvesting occurs as menhaden migrate into the bay, where they enter Maryland's waters. What this essentially means is 75% of the quota for the entire Atlantic Coast is being taken in the bay or just before they enter the bay. While this may not be causing overfishing for the entire Atlantic Coast based on quotas, because all of these fish are being taken from essentially just the bay, it is having locally drastic effects on the ecosystem.

Therefore, I am strongly in favor of Senate Resolution 02 and action by the ASMFC to ensure that enough menhaden persist in the bay to sustain a healthy ecosystem. I also strongly suggest either delaying the start of the menhaden commercial season until after a significant amount of menhaden have migrated north along the Virginia coast into the Chesapeake bay (which occurs in spring/early summer), by pushing these factory fishing efforts out of the Chesapeake Bay at least 3 miles offshore into federal waters instead of along the coastline in state waters (as the fish in the state waters are most likely to migrate along the coast into the bay), pushing the commercial menhaden fishery north of the entrance to the Chesapeake bay during their migration, and/or significantly reducing the quotas of menhaden in and around the mouth of the Chesapeake bay.

These actions are necessary to ensure the long-term health of the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem and the associated fisheries and ecotourism.

Sincerely,

Dr. Noah Bressman, PhD  
Assistant Professor of Physiology  
Department of Biology  
Salisbury University  
[Noahbressman.wixsite.com/noah](http://Noahbressman.wixsite.com/noah)  
@NoahwithFish