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The Maryland Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus

The Sportsmen's Best Friend in Annapolis

March 8, 2023

SUPPORT FOR SJ 2 - Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission – Atlantic Menhaden – Prohibition on Commercial Reduction Fishing

Dear Chairman Feldman and Members of the EEE Committee,

Each year the number of menhaden surviving the Virginia netting gauntlet to successfully reach Maryland's portion of the Chesapeake Bay is declining. This scientifically documented fact is detrimental to both avian and marine species dependent upon the "Most Important Fish in the Sea". This must change; what is happening to the "Most Important Fish in the Sea" is intolerable. SJ 2 will send a bold, strong statement that Maryland wants ASFMC to take action as reflected therein.

On October 15, 2021, a fishery biology professor from Salisbury University (Dr. Noah Bressman, PhD) formally addressed the dire menhaden issue in a statement to Maryland's DNR Secretary, et al. For the record, the Maryland's Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus within the Maryland General Assembly fully supports the position taken by Dr. Bressman as evidence of the importance of passing SJ 2. Dr. Bressman stated:

"Currently, the Virginia-based menhaden fishery is [highly 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 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.

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 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 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."

We appreciate your consideration and ask for a favorable report on SJ2.


Senator Jack Bailey, Senate Co-Chair


Senator Katie Fry-Hester, Senate Co-Chair