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Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment

Testimony on: SJ2 “Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission – Atlantic Menhaden – Prohibition on Commercial Reduction Fishing”

Position: Support

Hearing Date: March 8, 2023

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club urges a favorable report on SJ2. This resolution asks the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission to exercise its authority regarding the management of the menhaden fishery to consider prohibiting commercial reduction fishing of Atlantic menhaden, including the use of purse seines and spotter planes, in the Chesapeake Bay.

Atlantic menhaden are a keystone species for the Chesapeake Bay. As noted by this resolution, Atlantic menhaden form a critical connection between the bottom and the top of the food chain. Menhaden are filter feeders, eating plankton and rotifers and helping clear the water of nutrient pollution.¹ They are also a vital source of food to predators, including other fish, dolphins, whales, osprey, and bald eagles. While this is incredibly important to the ecosystem of the Bay, it is also important to the fishing industry. Many species of fish that we harvest from the Bay rely on the menhaden as a food source, including rockfish (striped bass), bluefish, and weakfish.

The Chesapeake Bay is an important nursery for the menhaden that helps sustain the population along the entire Atlantic coast. It is deeply concerning that the number of menhaden juveniles have decreased significantly since 1976 and has stayed low in the last 20 years.²

To protect the natural vitality of the Chesapeake Bay, it is important that action be taken now. We urge the Committee to issue a favorable report.

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¹ <https://www.vims.edu/research/units/projects/menhaden/research/modeling.php>

² Durrell, E. Q. & Weedon, C. (2019). Striped Bass Seine Survey Juvenile Index Web Page.

DNR.Maryland.gov/Fisheries/Pages/Juvenile-Index.ASPX. Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Fisheries Service.