

January 27, 2020

Chairman Ken Plum
House Agriculture, Chesapeake Bay, and Natural Resources Committee
P.O. Box
Richmond, VA 23218

Dear Chairman Plum

We the undersigned represent a variety of businesses, charter boat operations, and recreational fisheries organizations from across the Commonwealth ask that you work to “Right the Wrong” with Menhaden.

The Commonwealth of Virginia is out of compliance with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) regulations on Menhaden Management. This is because one foreign owned company, Omega Protein, chose to arrogantly, blatantly, and publicly violate the ASMFC designated harvest cap in the Chesapeake Bay.

As you are no doubt aware, Virginia’s general code contains a different harvest cap than that designated by ASMFC. Virginia’s regulations cannot remain different than those of ASMFC. Virginia has been found out of compliance and faces a moratorium in June. This would affect not only the reduction fishery, but also the bait industry, crabbers, and recreational fishing. Many organizations have written Secretary Ross supporting his imposing a moratorium. Nine east coast governors including Governor Northam stated in their letter to Secretary Ross that Virginia must be held accountable. Clearly Virginia needs a permanent solution to the long standing menhaden problem in the bay. Now is the time to transfer all management responsibility from the General Assembly to the Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC) to prevent a moratorium and have full time regulation by professional fisheries managers.

Menhaden affects more than the 300 or so reduction industry jobs and the economy in Reedville Virginia. ASMFC set the Chesapeake Bay Cap at 51,000 MT as a precautionary measure in 2017 since the bay is the primary nursery for menhaden and many other fish. Marine biologist’s models estimate that striped bass have declined by 28% coast-wide as a result of the reduction fishery (Buchheister, et al 2017) and a VIMS study confirms that the striped bass diet is 30-40% menhaden. A Southwick study in 2016 found that striped bass generated almost \$8 billion to our country’s GDP. The economic value of Virginia’s striped bass fishery has declined to just over \$100 million per year from a high of over \$240 million a decade ago. Moreover, there are over 2,000 jobs in Virginia associated with striped bass (charter captains, marinas, bait and tackle shops, sporting goods, hotels, restaurants, etc.) With the recent striped bass restrictions, these jobs are in jeopardy. Striped bass charters in 2019 were down 50% to as much as 100% in some areas, and bait shops and hotels/restaurants report that striped bass business is way off.

Menhaden are often called the most important fish in the sea, and there is no longer any logical reason to have the General Assembly involved in the management of this fishery when VMRC effectively manages every other salt water fish. We believe management of this important species will remain most beneficial to the Commonwealth if Virginia continues to be a strong partner in the ASMFC as we are on all other fishery management plans. In order to do this, we urge you to pass legislation transferring all menhaden management out of state code to the

Virginia Marine Resource Commission. This will not prevent Omega Protein from fishing in the Chesapeake Bay, nor will it put them out of business.

VMRC is best positioned to provide expertise, oversight, and improved science, which has been lacking in the bay. The transfer to VMRC will ensure Virginia's timely compliance with any future changes to the interstate fishery management plan. Virginia's adoption of these changes in the management of menhaden will ensure businesses like ours can continue to profit from Virginia's many natural resources.

Accordingly, we urge you to pass HB1448 as written.

Respectfully,

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VA Saltwater Sportfishing Assn.
Virginia Beach, VA

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Maritime Mayhem
Deltaville, VA

Capt. Trip Mathews
Restin Easy Charters
Deltaville, VA

Capt. Bob Bailey
Teaser
Deltaville, VA

Capt. Alan Alexander
York River Charters
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Capt. Mike Avery
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Capt. Percy Blackburn
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Capt. Carlisle Bannister
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Capt. Tom Blatt
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cc: members of the House Agriculture, Chesapeake Bay, and Natural Resources Committee