

June 14, 2022

Governor Glenn Youngkin  
Office of the Governor  
P.O. Box 1475  
Richmond, VA 23218

Dear Governor Youngkin,

As members of the recreational fishing and boating community, we ask that you move menhaden reduction fishing out of the Chesapeake Bay until science demonstrates that high volume reduction fishing for menhaden can be allowed without negatively affecting the broader Bay ecosystem.

America's anglers and boaters consistently play an integral role in the stewardship of our shared natural resources by directly funding conservation and habitat restoration efforts through licensing fees and excise taxes set up through the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund on fishing equipment and boat fuel. In 2021 alone, \$399 million was apportioned to the states to fund fishery conservation programs.<sup>1</sup> This resulted in \$6.26 million in funds for conservation programs specifically in Virginia, funded solely by anglers and boaters.

Our recreational fishing coalition of national and Virginia-based groups is clearly dedicated to maintaining the health of the Chesapeake Bay, the region's economy, and the broader marine ecosystem in the Atlantic. A major source of our conservation ethic is the fact that saltwater recreational fishing is an economic powerhouse, especially for Virginia where fishing is enjoyed by 600,000 anglers annually, contributing \$465 million to the Commonwealth's economy and supporting 6,504 jobs.<sup>2</sup> The jobs created by these fisheries are the lifeblood of our coastal communities as more than 90 percent of the sportfishing and boating industry is made up of small businesses.

Atlantic menhaden play a vital role in maintaining the sportfishing economy and the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem by serving as the base of the food chain for many recreationally important species. Specifically, menhaden are critical to the diets of gamefish like striped bass, bluefish, weakfish, and more, that feed Americans and keep them coming to Virginia waters and spending money in our coastal communities. For example, the striped bass fishery is the largest marine recreational fishery in the U.S., driving \$166 million in recreational fishing activity in Virginia alone. However, the economic value of striped bass fishing to Virginia has declined by over 50 percent in the past decade.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Certificate of Apportionment For Dingell-Johnson Sport Fish Restoration, available at: [https://www.fws.gov/sites/default/files/documents/SFR%20FY22%20Certificate%20of%20Final%20Apportionment%202022Feb3\\_508.pdf](https://www.fws.gov/sites/default/files/documents/SFR%20FY22%20Certificate%20of%20Final%20Apportionment%202022Feb3_508.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Fisheries Economics of the United States, 2021, available at: [https://media.fisheries.noaa.gov/2021-11/FEUS-2018-final-508\\_0.pdf](https://media.fisheries.noaa.gov/2021-11/FEUS-2018-final-508_0.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> The Economic Contributions of Recreational and Commercial Striped Bass Fishing, 2019, available at: <https://mcgrawconservation.org/wp-content/uploads/McGraw-Striped-Bass-Report-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Evaluating Ecosystem-Based Reference Points for Atlantic Menhaden, 2017, available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19425120.2017.1360420>

<sup>5</sup> ASMFC news release, 2019, available at: [http://www.asmfc.org/uploads/file/5dfbd30bpr40SecretarialSupport\\_Menhaden\\_VANoncompliance.pdf](http://www.asmfc.org/uploads/file/5dfbd30bpr40SecretarialSupport_Menhaden_VANoncompliance.pdf)

Part of the decline in the striped bass population is explained by fishing mortality being too high, and in 2014 and 2020 our coalition supported significant reductions on the striped bass fishery to address that decline. However, according to a scientific model, menhaden reduction fishing also contributes to a nearly 30 percent decline in striped bass numbers coast wide.<sup>4</sup> The scientific linkage between menhaden as prey and striped bass as a main predator is undeniable. Therefore, the industrial menhaden fishery in the Chesapeake plays a role in the ability of striped bass to rebuild to healthy population levels. By removing more than 100 million pounds of menhaden every year from the Chesapeake Bay, the most important striped bass nursery on the East Coast, reduction fishing in Virginia is undermining the sportfishing economy and small businesses throughout the Commonwealth.

The detrimental impact of menhaden reduction fishing on the ecosystem is so pronounced that it is prohibited in every state along the East Coast except Virginia. However, each year, over 100 million pounds of menhaden are being removed from the Chesapeake Bay and "reduced" to fish meal and oil for pet food and salmon feed by a foreign-owned company—Cooke Inc. Locally known as Omega Protein, the corporation is exporting this keystone fish to other countries as a global commodity, despite repeated signs of the negative impact it is causing to the environment and other industries dependent on a healthy marine ecosystem. In fact, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) found Virginia out of compliance with the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic menhaden in 2019, after Omega Protein exceeded the Chesapeake Bay harvest cap by 33 million pounds.<sup>5</sup>

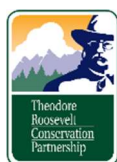
Over the past decade, recreational fishing and boating organizations, coastal businesses, and hundreds of thousands of individual anglers and conservationists have called on decisionmakers to leave enough menhaden in the water to feed the wildlife that support vibrant recreational fishing, boating and other industries that boost Virginia's coastal economy. Governor Youngkin, we urge you to use your authority to move menhaden reduction fishing out of the Bay until science demonstrates that menhaden fishing can be allowed without negatively affecting the broader Bay ecosystem. Importantly, you could put this stopgap in place and still allow Omega Protein to fish in Virginia's ocean waters.

Moving menhaden reduction fishing out of the Bay will help to protect the health of the ecosystem and help grow Virginia's outdoor recreational economy, which benefits all Virginians.

Thank you for your consideration.

**Whit Fosburgh**

President & CEO



Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

**Glenn Hughes**

President



American Sportfishing Association

**Frank Hugelmeyer**

President

National Marine Manufacturers Association



**Jim McDuffie**

President & CEO

Bonefish & Tarpon Trust



**Matt Gruhn**

President

Marine Retailers Association of the Americas



**Greg Jacoski**

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**Patrick Murray**

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**Ellen Peel**

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**Ernie Padgette**

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### Virginia Angling Clubs

**Steve Atkinson**

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**Captain Mike Ostrander**

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