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VIA EMAIL

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Mike Waine
Menhaden Fishery Management Plan Coordinator
ASMFC
1050 N. Highland St. Suite 200 A-N
Arlington, VA 22201

The Virginia Saltwater Sportsman Association (VSSA) is a new and growing organization of recreational fisherman and commercial fishing establishments in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Our mission includes representing the interests of Virginia's recreational saltwater anglers, ensuring the long-term sustainability of Virginia's fisheries, while protecting Virginia's marine, boat and tackle industry jobs

VSSA does not support any action that would increase the total allowable catch or undo any of the restrictions enacted in ASMFC's historic December 2012 action to reduce the coast wide catch of Menhaden.

Despite the recent positive news contained in the benchmark assessment about the menhaden biomass, menhaden abundance is not following the same trend and we believe the various Menhaden fisheries require further careful management. VSSA is cognizant selected states have exceeded their quota in the past year and that Virginia has the largest portion of that quota. Any action taken to increase the quota risks a whiplash reaction should future assessments indicate further decline in the bio-mass. If anything, re allocating or trading the current quota between states is more acceptable to VSSA than increasing the quota.

Moreover, as you know, Menhaden play an important ecological role as forage for other species. Historically, this important role has not adequately been taken into account when making management decisions. Menhaden serve as important forage for other species such as striped bass, weakfish, cod and bluefin tuna. Menhaden are also food for seabirds like osprey and eagles, and cetaceans like humpback whales which support ecotourism businesses. These wildlife species are economically important to a wide array of interests along the Atlantic Coast. VSSA feels strongly that fishery managers must significantly strengthen menhaden's ecological role into the management process.

In summary VSSA urges the Menhaden Management Board to:

1. Maintain the status quo on the Coast wide Total Allowable Catch for Menhaden. Keep the current menhaden catch limits in place
2. Adopt interim Ecological Reference Points (accounting for predator needs) prior to making any changes in future harvest decisions. Initiate an addendum or amendment process to adopt final ecological reference points and determine a more appropriate allocation amongst the various fisheries that operate along the Atlantic Coast
3. Under the current (Amendment 2) management system, quota can be traded between states. Virginia could transfer a relatively small amount of quota and solve all other states' current shortages without increasing the coast wide catch.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Respectfully,

CC: John Bull, Virginia Marine Resource Commission
Martin Gary, Potomac River Fisheries Commission