



For Immediate Release

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Why Did the Menhaden Die? What Response Should it Prompt?

Aug. 11, 2010, Cape May, NJ. New Jersey's Department of Environmental Protection reported thousands of Menhaden dead on the shores of the Delaware Bay in Cape May, NJ today, August 11. Similarly, the Boston Globe reported dead Menhaden in Fairhaven Massachusetts in the past day. While NJDEP says it is still conducting tests, others are already blaming low oxygen levels for the massive fish kill in the Delaware Bay as well as in Massachusetts.



According to Maya van Rossum, the Delaware Riverkeeper who surveyed the scene today, in the late afternoon hours, "thousands upon thousands of Menhaden lined the beaches as far as my eye could see. While the cause is still under investigation, we know for sure that the Delaware Bay some of the highest nutrient

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concentrations of any waterbody in the world, that it still suffers from low dissolved oxygen in critical reaches of the River, and that during times of drought the River system is always stressed and our assumptions about whether or not we are doing a good enough job at pollution prevention and River protection get put to the test. This fish kill, if the result of low dissolved oxygen, is telling us that we are not doing a good enough job at protecting water quality for the fish and all who rely upon them.”

According to van Rossum, the Delaware River Basin Commission’s Water Quality Advisory Committee has been considering the need for strong nutrient regulations for the Delaware Estuary because of issues like low oxygen. “Industry has been challenging the need for such protections, suggesting that there is no sign of stress or harm to warrant action. Perhaps the Menhaden die off is the first overt sign of stress needed to convince the DRBC that strong action is needed today to regulate nutrients entering the Delaware River and tributary streams, before it is too late.”

While van Rossum praised the NJDEP for being quick to distribute information on the fish kill and its scientific findings, she also warned that this should be a wake up call for New Jersey who had recently taken steps to weaken nutrient protections in state regulation.



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