

March 28, 2014

Dear Assemblyman or Senator,

We urge you to refrain from supporting any effort to increase allowable harvest of menhaden from the Delaware Bay including a recently introduced legislation amendment (Assembly, N. 2684/ Senate Bill 1844) that establishes Menhaden Personal Use and Limited Sale Licenses and permits. There have been strong and scientifically based protections put in place for the Menhaden and this change, as small as it may seem, will inflict harm on the Delaware Bay ecosystem.

Menhaden are a key forage fish for larger, more commercially valuable, and ecologically important species. Overfishing of menhaden may threaten the species' spawning potential as well as their ability to provide enough forage for other fish and mammals that rely on them. For example, striped bass diet analysis showed that menhaden was the most important food consumed.ⁱ Scientific research has shown that menhaden are keystone species and critical to the intricate marine systems they support.ⁱⁱ Additionally, menhaden are filter feeders and therefore, help clean the water in our rivers and bay. In addition to the environmental impacts to the aquatic ecosystem, caution is needed when managing this forage species because thousands of jobs, the fishing industry, and recreation depend on robust forage stocks. There is much uncertainty in stock assessments of menhaden and therefore, it is unknown how new fisheries and different menhaden harvest limits would impact the Delaware Bay.ⁱⁱⁱ

It is apparent that a healthy menhaden stock is vital not only to the Delaware Bay ecosystem but also to the communities that rely on a healthy ecosystem for jobs and recreation. It is important to maintain catch levels so to leave enough menhaden for the fish and birds that rely on these foraging fish and in doing so prevent harm to the fishing industry. Please do not support new thresholds and target fishing rates so that menhaden populations in the Delaware watershed can increase to a point where they can support sustainable fisheries and fulfill their vital ecological role.

Respectfully,

Mayo K. von Rom

Maya K. van Rossum the Delaware Riverkeeper

DELAWARE RIVERKEEPER NETWORK 925 Canal Street, Suite 3701 Bristol, PA 19007 Office: (215) 369-1188 fax: (215) 369-1181 drn@delawareriverkeeper.org www.delawareriverkeeper.org

- Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC) 2006. Striped bass food habits project. Retrieved from URL: http://www.dnrec.delaware.gov/fw/SiteCollectionDocuments/FW%20Gallery/StripedBas sFoodHabits.pdf
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