



News Release

Coastal Conservation Association

6919 Portwest, Suite 100, Houston, TX 77024

Email: twvenker@joincca.org

Website: www.joincca.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 11, 2010

CONTACT: Ted Venker, 1-800-201-FISH

ASMFC Finally Cuts Bait

Committee moves forward with addressing management targets for menhaden

At its meeting last week in Washington DC, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) directed its Menhaden Technical Committee to develop new options for managing menhaden more like a critical forage species than a fish to be industrially harvested. A move that many East Coast anglers would say is long past due.

“Only in Bizarro World can a stock reach the lowest point in its recorded history and the reference points used to manage that stock still indicate that all is well and it is not overfished nor is overfishing occurring,” said Richen Brame, CCA Atlantic States Fisheries director. “When the reference points you are using allow the stock to decline continuously since 1984 from an estimated 186 billion fish to 18 billion and no management action is contemplated, much less triggered, then you need a different set of reference points, and that’s what the ASMFC has directed the Technical Committee to do.”

Much of the debate over menhaden centers over its industrial harvest in Chesapeake Bay, not only the primary spawning ground on the East Coast for prized gamefish like striped bass and bluefish, but also where about half the entire coastal harvest of menhaden for reduction occurs. Historically, the ASMFC has managed menhaden for yield to satisfy its role as an industrial fish rather than abundance. CCA has long argued that menhaden’s critical role as a forage species for apex predators meant that every single menhaden has importance as a prey item for other fish that are greatly valued by anglers.

“This is a forage species and its abundance is extremely important, not only to maintain the population but also to serve as food for everything else,” said Kevin Smith, president of CCA Virginia. “For the main prey item in the Chesapeake Bay to be at its lowest level ever is a potential catastrophe for the gamefish that depend on them. All the signs indicate that something is clearly wrong and managers should have acted before now, but we are relieved to see them finally moving in this direction.”

The status of menhaden has taken on more significance with the prevalence of *Mycobacteriosis* infections among striped bass in Chesapeake Bay. The first reports of *Mycobacterium*-infected striped bass in the Chesapeake date back to 1984 and today more than 70 percent of bass display *Myco* lesions. There is growing evidence that a lack of suitable forage, especially menhaden, has stressed the fish and made them particularly vulnerable to the fatal disease.

“The stock has been declining for over 15 years and we still allow thousands of metric tons to be harvested every year,” said Scott McGuire, chairman of the CCA Maryland Government Relations Committee. “Managers have to realize we can’t continue to manage menhaden as we have in the past, and expect different results. It is long overdue, but we applaud the ASMFC for beginning this process.”

###

CCA is the largest marine resource conservation group of its kind in the nation. With almost 100,000 members in 17 state chapters, CCA has been active in state, national and international fisheries management issues since 1977. For more information visit the CCA Newsroom at www.JoinCCA.org.