



News Release

Coastal Conservation Association

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ASMFC Continues Effort to Increase Commercial Bass Harvest *Gamble to increase commercial take by up to 50 percent heads for public hearings*

WASHINGTON DC - Anglers will soon have the opportunity to comment on a new effort to increase the coastal commercial harvest of striped bass by 20 to 50 percent, after the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's (ASMFC) Striped Bass Management Board voted this week to send the proposal out for public hearing.

Last February, conservationists were stunned when the Board chose to ignore a litany of significant concerns from scientists and enforcement officers about the health of the striped bass population, and instead directed its staff to draft the proposal. This week's 10-6 vote to send the proposal out for public hearing indicates that many members of the Board are committed to ramping up commercial harvest even as anglers are seeing serious warning signs on the water.

"This is the wrong message at the wrong time for striped bass, but it is not surprising," said Charles Witek, chairman of CCA's Atlantic Fisheries Committee. "When recently faced with even worse situations involving weakfish and the southern New England stock of winter flounder, both very badly depleted and both faced with apparent increases in natural mortality, ASMFC ignored clear scientific advice and voted to maintain harvest at unsustainable levels. Our greatest conservation challenge may simply be to convince managers at ASMFC to do their jobs."

Among the recent information presented to managers was a report on the declining trend in the striped bass Juvenile Abundance Index, a report from law enforcement personnel on "significant and unreported" poaching in the Exclusive Economic Zone, and a report on the potentially devastating impact of *Mycobacteriosis* in Chesapeake Bay, the primary striped bass spawning ground for the entire Atlantic Coast, where 70 percent of the fish sampled had lesions associated with the disease. In aquaculture, *Mycobacteriosis* infections are virtually always fatal.

"While the stock is still not overfished nor undergoing overfishing, ASMFC's Striped Bass Technical Committee recently issued a report which predicts that the number of adult bass will steadily decline through the year 2015. Clearly, a cautious approach is warranted, yet the Board has chosen to roll the dice with the most important recreational species on the East Coast," said Richen Brame, CCA's Atlantic Fisheries director.

Unlike the 1970s when rampant overfishing was the primary cause of the stock collapse, the current wide variety of factors that are negatively impacting striped bass will be much more difficult to address. Nonetheless, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, Delaware, Maryland, the Potomac River Fisheries Commission, the District of Columbia, Virginia, North Carolina and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service voted to push forward with increasing commercial harvest.

"This is a dangerous, unnecessary gamble," said Brame. "We will be doing our part to make sure managers know that anglers do not want to risk the future of this fishery by increasing commercial harvest."

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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.