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ASFMC Denies Increase in Commercial Striped Bass Harvest

Anglers rally to defeat proposal for commercial sector to kill more fish

Coastal Conservation Association commends the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) for denying a proposal to increase the commercial harvest of striped bass at its meeting this week in Newport, Rhode Island. The proposal would have allowed commercial fishermen to add at least half of their uncaught commercial striped bass quota to their quota for the following year. Many anglers from CCA Maine made the journey to Newport to express their concern over the status of this important fish, and their voice made a difference. "The Striped Bass Board understands that anglers at the north and south of the striped bass range are not seeing the numbers of fish they saw even just a few years ago," said Richen Brame, CCA's Atlantic States fisheries director. "There is cause for concern and we commend the ASMFC for taking a conservative approach." In its formal comments before the ASMFC against the proposal, CCA cited several disturbing trends in the striped bass fishery, including a dramatic decrease in the number of striped bass caught and released by recreational fishermen, particularly in the northeastern states of New Hampshire and Maine, the prevalence of the fatal disease Mycobacteriosis among the Chesapeake Bay spawning stock, and a Fish and Wildlife Service annual survey that encountered the fewest striped bass in the survey's history. "While officially the stock is not overfished and not undergoing overfishing, there are signs that the overall abundance is declining," said Brame. "The proposed action to allow the commercial industry to take more fish was not a remedy for any of the problems we are seeing with striped bass. Increasing abundance is what will fix those problems." While the motion was defeated by a vote of 8-6, the margin of the victory means recreational anglers will have to maintain vigilance at the ASMFC to protect the recovery of striped bass. "After the vote on the original motion, there was immediately another motion to allow the

commercial sector to rollover 25 percent of their uncaught harvest to the next year, which was also defeated,” said Brame. “We will continue to see efforts like this and it was very encouraging to hear Board members remark on the number of comments they received against this proposal from the public. Our members will have to be ready to stand up for conservation.” The following states voted against the rollover proposal: Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Delaware, Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia. Voting for the proposal were Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, Potomac River Fisheries Commission, North Carolina and the National Marine Fisheries Service. The Fish and Wildlife Service abstained. *### 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. Visit www.JoinCCA.org <<http://www.joincca.org/>> for more information.*