



January 2018

SUPPORT HOUSE BILL 822: ATLANTIC MENHADEN MANAGEMENT

In November 2017, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) approved changes to the coastwide fishery management plan for the Atlantic menhaden population. These changes:

- Adjust the Virginia menhaden catch limit to 168,213.16 metric tons.
- Maintain a quota transfer program that will allow Virginia access to uncaught quota from other states.
- Maintain provisions that will allow operational certainty for Virginia's small-scale bait fisheries.
- Update the Chesapeake Bay Reduction Fishery Harvest Cap to the average catch of the last five years, an amount of approximately 51,000 metric tons.
- Prohibit quota rollovers that allow unfilled yearly quotas to be caught the following year, potentially inflating the catch.

What Needs to Be Done

It is critical that Virginia legislators ensure the health of the menhaden population, the Bay ecosystem, and provide certainty for Virginia's economy by **supporting Delegate Knight's House Bill 822**, which implements the ASMFC's menhaden coastwide management plan. Failure to adopt this legislation, necessary to conform with the management plan, could lead to serious sanctions, including a shut-down of all menhaden fisheries in the Commonwealth, threatening the livelihoods of thousands of hardworking Virginians.

Why Are Menhaden So Important

Atlantic menhaden are herring-like fish that form large schools and are normally found in the Chesapeake Bay from spring to fall. They have been called "the most important fish in the sea" because of their key ecological role as both a filter feeder and a primary food source for many Bay species.

Menhaden are caught by the industrial "reduction" fishery based in Reedville that processes the fish into oil and meal, making the small Northern Neck town one of the largest fish landing ports (by weight) in the United States. Menhaden are also caught by numerous operations which supply the fish to commercial crabbers for whom menhaden is the bait of choice. These fisheries have a significant positive economic impact and support several hundred jobs in the Commonwealth.

As prey fish, menhaden nourish Chesapeake Bay striped bass, bluefish, summer flounder, and other popular fish targeted by commercial and recreational fishing industries. The Chesapeake Bay is the largest nursery for menhaden and striped bass on the Atlantic Coast. Restoring menhaden numbers will benefit both ecological and economic interests throughout the Bay region.

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