

July 16, 2020

Kirby Rootes-Murdy, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator  
Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC)  
1050 North Highland Street, Suite 200 A-N  
Arlington, Virginia 22201

**Re: Implement ecological reference points for Atlantic menhaden**

Dear Mr. Rootes-Murdy, Director Beal, Chairman Spud Woodward, and members of the Menhaden Management Board,

As more than 80 organizations, businesses, and individuals representing hundreds of thousands of members, business patrons and communities in every Atlantic state, we support the implementation of ecological reference points (ERPs) for Atlantic menhaden. This approach to management explicitly accounts for the significant role Atlantic menhaden play as forage fish and provides guidance to ensure that healthy levels are maintained in the water to feed predator species and support the coastal economy that we depend on.

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission authority to protect Atlantic menhaden for the broader ecosystem was strongly affirmed by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce late last year. The transition to multispecies management using ERPs upholds this commitment and is crucial for the multitude of species that depend on Atlantic menhaden including gamefish like striped bass, bluefish, king mackerel, and tarpon; marine mammals such as whales, dolphins, and seals; as well as birds including osprey, bald eagles, common loons, and brown pelicans. As key prey for these and other species, Atlantic menhaden provide a critical backbone for our coastal communities, and the many businesses like ours and wildlife-viewing opportunities that they support on and off the water.

The Atlantic Ocean economy depends on menhaden. In 2018, over 1 million jobs and over \$56 billion in economic activity were supported by outdoor activities including recreation, tourism, engagement with wildlife and fishing along the U.S. East Coast.<sup>i</sup> The United States supports the largest whale watching industry in the world, with over 80 businesses operating on the East Coast that host 1 million whale watchers annually, generating over \$145 million in associated economic activity.<sup>ii</sup> Menhaden are the foundation of a way of life, and managing for their abundance is essential for the healthy marine ecosystems and economies we depend on—made even more critical in light of the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on coastal communities.

ASMFC has a historic opportunity to become a national and global leader in how we approach the management of forage fish like Atlantic menhaden, as well as for the ecosystems, economies and communities that depend on their health and abundance. Implementing ERPs conservatively will help safeguard the many businesses and individuals that depend on menhaden and its predators, and represents the right step forward in the necessary transition to ecosystem-based fishery management. Thank you.

Sincerely,

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<sup>i</sup> National Ocean Economics Program, Ocean Economy data for Establishments, Employment, Wages, and/or GDP for coastal states, accessed July 2020, <https://www.oceaneconomics.org/Market/ocean/oceanEcon.asp>.

<sup>ii</sup> O'Connor, S., Campbell, R., Cortez, H., & Knowles, T., 2009, Whale Watching Worldwide: tourism numbers, expenditures and expanding economic benefits, a special report from the International Fund for Animal Welfare, Yarmouth MA, USA, prepared by Economists at Large.



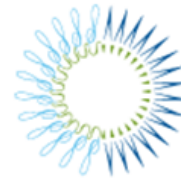
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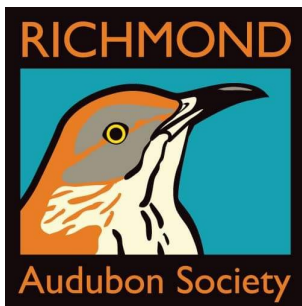
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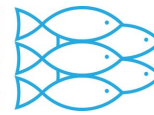
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