



“Working to Protect and Preserve the Rights, Traditions, and Future of Recreational Fishing”

The Use of Gill Nets for Commercial Harvesting of Striped Bass in Maryland Waters

March 3, 2011

The Maryland Saltwater Sportfishermen’s Association (MSSA) would like to recognize and support the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Natural Resources Police (NRP) for their commitment to review the striped bass gill net fishery. While the MSSA supports and will continue to support the DNR’s actions, we have deep concern for the sustainability of the fishery and the enforceability of our current regulations. The MSSA therefore supports an elimination on the use of gill nets in Maryland waters for the purpose of commercially harvesting striped bass.

An elimination of gill nets for striped bass would significantly reduce the potential for illegally harvesting. It would also improve the biomass and relieve the State from needlessly incurring the cost and expense of enforcement under existing regulations. The MSSA further believes the lack of enforcement, due in part to an inability to adequately police gill netting, warrants the elimination of any method of gill netting in Maryland waters. Evidenced time and time again over the years and as recently as February of this year when Natural Resources Police discovered the illegal netting of 8.5 tons of rockfish, Maryland’s enforcement resources are insufficient to police and halt poaching on our waters. This results is the theft of precious natural resources, as well as negatively impacting the fishery and local economies and jeopardizing public trust.

To ease the financial burden that the elimination of the striped bass gill net season would have on those whose livelihood is fishing, the MSSA would endorse a reallocation of the gill net season for striped bass to a hook and line fishery for full-time watermen.

Eliminating the use of gill nets for striped bass is only one part of the solution. Maryland must adopt significant penalties and fines for those convicted of poaching, employing illegal harvesting methods, or in possession of undersized fish. This would include all persons who enable the wrongdoer. Maryland needs to send a clear

message to all who would rape its natural resources that the penalties for such illegal conduct are severe. Maryland must enact laws now that declare anyone caught poaching, employing banned fishing methods, or possessing illegal fish will result in the confiscation of fishing gear, tackle, vessels, vehicles, or any other property that are the fruits from such illegal activity, as well as incarceration.

The MSSA believes that those who enable the wrongdoers should be deemed to be co-conspirators and subject to the same fines and penalties as the person who commits the illegal actions. Maryland must vertically integrate its laws to penalize those who benefit from illegal actions committed against our natural resources.

Only the confiscation of liberty or property, or both, will be enough to provide a sufficient deterrent to those who benefit at the expense of the environment. The MSSA also supports the enactment of legislation that individuals violating Maryland's Natural Resources anti-poaching laws, a person must be forever barred from being eligible to possess the right to hold a license to fish or hunt.

It is for the reasons stated above that the MSSA adamantly supports an elimination on the use of gill nets for striped bass in Maryland waters. We strongly encourage our elected officials to eliminate gill netting for striped bass, reallocate net fish quotas to a hook and line fishery for full-time fishermen only, and enact new legislation strengthening penalties and fines to include the confiscation of property and/or liberty from anyone who wrongfully profits from the destruction of Maryland's precious natural resources including those who conspire to do so.

Best Regards,
President

Richard J. Gold