



## Maryland Saltwater Sportfishermen's Association

8461 Ft. Smallwood Rd, Suite C, Pasadena, MD 21122 - 410-255-5535 - [www.mssa.net](http://www.mssa.net)

*November 11, 2010*

Dear Governor O'Malley, Secretary Griffin, and Director O'Connell

On behalf of the Maryland Saltwater Sportfishermen's Association (MSSA) and recreational anglers in the state of Maryland, I am asking for *Reallocation for Conservation* of the striped bass harvest from the commercial fishery to the recreational fishery. I am making this request in order to protect Maryland residents' best opportunity to enjoy fishing the bay, the positive economic and social impacts of sportfishing in our state, and as a necessary conservation measure.

In recent times there is growing concern for the status of the health of the striped bass population as well as the Chesapeake Bay. This trepidation is not only being expressed by our membership, who regularly fish the Chesapeake Bay for this species, but is evident through some scientific indices and concerns being noted within the ASMFC and our own biologists within the DNR. Concern is also plainly evident in the recent feedback given at public meetings regarding the potential increase in coastal quota for striped bass. Because Maryland is recognized as the primary nursery and spawning grounds to these highly sought after fish, it is our responsibility to act accordingly and make adjustments to our fisheries when necessary.

The Chesapeake Bay is recognized as one of our country's National Treasures and is truly our state's greatest natural resource. Having public access and opportunity to fish this resource is nearly exclusively dependent upon the striped bass fishery and the health of the stock. Striped bass is the most sought after fish by anglers in our bay waters and not only draws hundreds of thousands of anglers from within our state to enjoy our resource but many anglers from outside our area as well. The social and economic impacts of recreational fishing on our state are irrefutable. Recreational fishing not only has over a \$1 billion economic impact and directly provides over ten thousand jobs to our state; it enables families to spend time together and gives our citizens direct interaction with our environment, making for a healthier society. It is because of the need for this fish both economically and socially as it pertains to a gamefish that Maryland must protect the access and opportunity afforded to its citizens to fish for this species.

The commercial harvest of striped bass in Maryland is immensely large and vastly disproportionate to the recreational fishery as opposed to other states along the migratory run. In recent years the commercial striped bass harvest in Maryland makes up nearly one-third of the entire commercial take in pounds from all coastal states and has averaged over 2.3 million pounds for the last few years. Noting that Maryland watermen tend to take a fish of lesser weight when compared to regions that allow for the harvest of fish over 36", the actual number of fish being harvested comparably is significantly inflated. The harvest is more than 35% higher than Virginia, who has the second largest commercial harvest, and more than doubles the commercial harvest of Massachusetts, who has the third largest harvest behind MD and VA. While Maryland has by far the largest commercial harvest in pounds on striped

bass, our recreational harvest ranks 4th among all states. Yet, no other area like the Chesapeake Bay is so dependent upon this one species for its primary recreational fishery.

The value for the fish on the commercial market has been stagnant at best. The 2010 gillnet season was even temporarily closed for striped bass in order to prevent watermen from reaching their quota early and in an attempt to hold the value of the fish, as it was said to have been "depressed" according to DNR (January 11, 2010 public notice). A reduction in allocation may only stand to benefit commercial watermen through holding the value of the fish up and allowing a waterman to earn a similar wage with less harvest while being exposed to less risks of being on the water. It may also lend itself to less user conflict on the water as well.

Anglers have also specifically expressed concerns over the winter gillnet season and the YOY indices. With the possibility of global warming and the potential for an earlier spawn, some anglers are troubled that the setting of long gillnets may have an ill-effect on fish migrating into the bay to spawn. It is because of this concern that I suggest that the greatest commercial allocation reduction come from this fishery in particular.

Because of these concerns over the health of the striped bass stock and in an effort to conserve and protect the benefits of recreational fishing, I request that this reallocation to the recreational side not go towards expanding the Chesapeake Bay recreational regulations. Instead, I ask that this reallocation be held and provide security for the recreational seasons that are already in place when target goals are exceeded, such as the 2009 trophy season. This will provide greater security to the access and opportunity that recreational anglers have learned to enjoy while acting as a measure that stands to benefit the overall health of the stock.

On behalf of our members, our state's thousands of recreational anglers, our industry business owners, I appreciate your time on this very important matter. The health of the striped bass population is vital to recreational fishing and recreational fishing is vital to the economies and social fabric of our state. Your consideration and action on this matter is imperative in maintaining the access and opportunity, the health of the striped bass stock, and the future of recreational fishing that so many anglers have come to know and enjoy. Please feel free to advise how the Maryland Saltwater Sportfishermen's Association can assist in accomplishing this reallocation. I look forward to an open dialog on this and other issues concerning our fishery.

Sincerely,

Dave Smith  
Executive Director,  
Maryland Saltwater Sportfishermen's Association