



February 24, 2012

(ANNAPOLIS, MD) – The Chesapeake Bay is our state's greatest natural resource and a national treasure. Because of its immense value to the citizens of our state and our economy, the region's largest recreational fishing advocacy group, the Maryland Saltwater Sportfishing Association (MSSA), and Senator Kathy Klausmeier have joined forces to protect this great asset through the introduction of - **Senate Bill 1032 – Prohibiting the use of gill nets for catching finfish within Maryland.** "This bill is targeted at protecting jobs, our environment, and our citizen's ability to enjoy healthy natural resources," stated Dave Smith, the MSSA's executive director.

Gill nets are entanglement nets that have made headlines for more than a decade due to their destructive impacts on our marine resources. The most recent headlines came last year where nearly 12 tons of illegally caught striped bass were pulled from the Bay forcing the Department of Natural Resources to temporarily shut down the netting season. These headlines follow previous incidents where 9.3 miles of illegal gill nets were found off of Rockhall in 2010 and an eight year federal investigation yielded millions of pounds of illegally harvested fish from the Chesapeake watershed. "The time to protect our fisheries from this harmful gear-type is long overdue," Smith added.

Currently, the state of Maryland allows gill nets, ranging in size up to 3,500 yards (1.98 miles) in length, to be drifted. "That is nearly half the length of the Bay Bridge" noted Smith. Gill nets are positioned vertically in the water column, taking advantage of current, tide, and the movement of marine life as they get tangled in the nets. Despite the inherent destructiveness of the legal nets, their use also provides cover for those who wish to fish illegally, making the gill net fishery difficult to manage. Illegal nets have even been prone to abandonment and left to continue to their devastating harm to our treasure. Last year an abandoned net was found by a recreational angler, months after the rockfish gill net season had closed. It was over 600 yards long and had hundreds of pounds of decaying fish. Given that the Chesapeake Bay is home and the spawning grounds to the East Coast's most sought after saltwater sport fish, the striped bass or rockfish, and numerous other important fisheries **including some endangered species**, there is absolutely no reason to allow this gear-type in Maryland, according to the advocacy group.

Economically, the Bill offers the protection of our resources to better secure the thousands of jobs provided to the state through both our recreational and commercial fisheries. Recreational fishing alone has a 1 billion dollar economic impact to the state of Maryland and provides nearly 10 thousand jobs. "This bill does not eliminate jobs, it protects them." Smith said. While the bill does eliminate one particular commercial gear-type, **there are numerous other gear-types that watermen use to effectively and legally harvest fish**, such as pound nets, fyke nets, haul seine,



Maryland Saltwater Sportfishing Association

8461 Ft. Smallwood Rd, Pasadena, MD 21122, - 410-255-5535 - www.mssa.net

cast nets, and of course hook and line. Additionally, prohibiting gill nets only stands to ease management burdens on the Department of Natural Resources, who is facing a \$3.2 million dollar deficit in 2013. "The DNR has introduced cost recovery legislation to make up a portion of the management costs, but there is still a long way to go" noted Smith. The MSSA believes that between the cost recovery and harmful effects gill nets have on our marine resources, prohibiting the use of gill nets seems like the logical step, a step that some other states have already implemented. "We understand that this is not an easy issue to handle. We applaud the Senator for stepping up and doing what is right for future generations and the vitality of Maryland's marine resources", Vince Ringgold said, President of the MSSA.

Senate Bill 1032 – Prohibiting the use of gill nets for catching finfish within Maryland will be heard in the near future. The MSSA is encouraging everyone, regardless of fishing interest, to contact their legislators and tell them to **SUPPORT SB 1032**

If you would like to help protect our fisheries, send an email to your legislator. Visit www.mssa.net and click on the *Legislative Action* link at the top of the page and follow the directions. Enter your name and address in the lower right corner and a letter will be drafted and sent to your legislator.