



Maryland Saltwater Sportfishing Association

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UNFAVORABLE

Senate Bill 525 – Sustainable Fisheries Enforcement Fund

The Maryland Saltwater Sportfishing Association (MSSA) represents the largest and most diverse group of sportfishing and recreational anglers in the state. With over 7,000 members and 14 chapters, including one in Pennsylvania, we provide a unified voice from anglers all over the state on specific issues. This is extremely valuable when addressing decisions, such as increasing sportfishing fees.

On behalf of our 7,000+ members, the MSSA would like to encourage an UNFAVORABLE vote on SB 525. We would also like to note that the MSSA has a long history of supporting the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Natural Resources Police (NRP); and agree with the spirit of the bill to increase funding for NRP in order to protect our natural resources.

We oppose this bill based on the following;

- 1.) **Decreased Number of Anglers:** Research has shown that even a \$1 increase in the cost of a resident annual fishing license can result in a 4.7% decrease in license sales. In 2007, the voluntary sportfishing license fee increase resulted in an 11.23% decrease in license sales. This not only reduces the number of people on our waters, but per DNR this fee increase has an estimated \$900,000 reduction in license fee revenue for Fisheries Service.
- 2.) **Sportfishing Surplus:** In 2012 the DNR was mandated to do a study on “cost recovery” and possible solutions to achieve 100% cost recovery from all sectors. From that report we found that the recreational sector has a \$1.5 million surplus from the current fee amounts. Asking recreational anglers to pay more while having a surplus is inappropriate.
- 3.) **Negative Economic Impact:** The decreased number of anglers, as a result of this fee, will negatively impact small business such as tackle shops, marinas, lodging, hotels, and all other supporting businesses. The negative economic impact of this bill, though unintended, would be far reaching.
- 4.) **Money Not Guaranteed:** As you are well aware, dedicated funds are prohibited therefore we have no guarantee that these funds will be used for NRP enforcement and any statement otherwise is statutorily untrue.
- 5.) **Arbitrary Fee Increase:** The fee increase was not based on a needs analysis within NRP and instead was simply derived from an arbitrary amount then divided by number of users.

As stated above, we agree with the spirit of the bill; therefore we would like to recommend a possible avenue to properly fund the NRP.

First, we must secure support from all stakeholder groups and interested parties, preferably through a summer study mandated by this committee. Second, we need to determine both the short-term and long-term needs/goals of the NRP in regards to enforcement. Third, we must identify, if possible, alternative funding sources outside of tax and fee increases. Fourth, we must find a solution to the public perception that the money will not, in fact, be used for NRP enforcement. Finally, we must be vigilant in reviewing NRP needs and concerns to protect us from budget issues in the future. And only in this way will be able to draft a bill with complete stakeholder support and a funding mechanism to properly support the needs of the NRP well into the future.

In conclusion, we would like to once again stress the negative impacts a fee increase will have on our communities and the economies of Maryland. There are alternative revenue sources to explore and we encourage an UNFAVORABLE vote on SB 525.

Very Respectfully,

Vince Ringgold
President