



ASMFC's Menhaden Quota Increase Signals Step in Right Direction

WASHINGTON (Menhaden Fisheries Coalition) – May 5, 2015 – Today, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) adhered to the best available science on Atlantic menhaden, and took a step in the right direction in deciding to increase the allowable coast wide harvest of the commercially valuable species by 10 percent. Though still only half of the 20 percent harvest cut imposed on the fishery in 2012, today's decision signals a promising move toward responsible management of the species in accordance with the best available science. By building on the results of the 2015 stock assessment—the most accurate in the recorded history of the fishery—the Commission's decision will benefit the many fishermen and fishing communities that comprise the Menhaden Fisheries Coalition, hard-working people who have responsibly fished this resource for generations and who are still recovering from economically harmful and questionably justified harvest cuts enacted in 2012.

“It's encouraging to see the ASMFC's scientific findings and management decisions validate what menhaden fishermen have been saying for years now. We're hard working, but aren't overfishing,” said Jimmy Kellum, the owner of Kellum Maritime and a member of the Menhaden Fisheries Coalition, which represents over 90 percent of menhaden fishermen, related businesses, and supporting industries along the Atlantic Coast. “Now that the official science has finally caught up, the Commission should be commended for taking the responsible step and increasing harvests.”

The economic relief that will stem from this harvest increase, while not as great as it would be if the Commission committed to raising quotas to the full, scientifically allowable amount, is still much-needed and much-deserved, according to Coalition members, who saw coastal harvests reduced by 20 percent in 2012. This was on the heels of a stock assessment whose methodology and findings have since been called into question. The 2015 Atlantic Menhaden Benchmark Assessment, released earlier this year, found that menhaden were not overfished, and have not been for decades. Its findings all point to a healthy fishery: there are large numbers of adult menhaden that previous assessments assumed to not exist, levels of fecundity have risen to near-record highs, and fishing mortality has plummeted to record lows.

As [documented in prior statements](#) from the Menhaden Fisheries Coalition, today's decision is a necessary, if incomplete, corrective to the inaccurate picture of the fishery that resulted from the 2012 stock assessment. Now that the science has clearly determined that the stock is healthy and the fishery is sustainable, the Coalition applauds

the ASMFC's efforts to update its regulations accordingly.

“The menhaden fishery has continuously operated in Reedville, Virginia for over 100 years by being committed to sustainable and responsible fishing practices and also to the community members who depend on this fishery,” said Monty Deihl, Director of Fishing Operations at Omega Protein. “Today’s decision is a continuation of that tradition, one that sets both the fishery and the population on course for a sustainable future.”

While still less than the amount that was taken away from the fishery in 2012, this quota increase will give fishermen more of the opportunities they need to continue sustainably harvesting menhaden. It adheres to science-based management while still providing some relief to fishing communities along the Atlantic Coast who only a few years ago were forced to make tough economic sacrifices as a result of inaccurate scientific conclusions about the stock.

“The past couple of seasons have been difficult for many in the fishery, including our purse seiners, gillnetters, poundnetters and shoreside businesses,” said Greg DiDomenico, of the Garden State Seafood Association and another Menhaden Fisheries Coalition member. “Today’s decision doesn’t make us whole, but it puts us back on the right course with potential for additional increases based on sound, science-backed management.”

The Menhaden Fisheries Coalition supports the work of the ASMFC this week, and looks forward to working with regulators, scientists, community leaders and environmental organizations to ensure the Atlantic menhaden fishery’s continued sustainability for future generations.

About the Menhaden Fisheries Coalition

The Menhaden Fisheries Coalition is a collective of menhaden fisherman, related businesses, and supporting industries. Comprised of over 30 businesses along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, the Menhaden Fisheries Coalition conducts media and public outreach on behalf of the menhaden industry to ensure that members of the public, media, and government are informed of important issues, events, and facts about the fishery.