



# PRESS RELEASE

## Recreational Fishing Alliance

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For Immediate Release  
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### **RFA-NJ SUPPORTS LEGISLATION TO PROTECT MENHADEN Senate Bill 1140 Expected in Committee on June 3 in Trenton**

In what many striper fishermen are calling a sight unseen for more than a decade, fleets of bunker boats have set up local menhaden schools along the Jersey coast. According to the Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA) however, the current problem with bunker boats in state waters is not the same today as it was back in the 1990's.

"These are bait boats, not reduction boats, so we're not seeing the massive, mechanized depletion of our coastal bunker stocks for the purpose of reduction," said Jim Donofrio, RFA's Executive Director. "We're proud to say that it's still a violation of state law for reduction fleets to work inside state waters, but now it's time for our legislators to address the problem of New Jersey potentially becoming the bait capital for New England." Donofrio explains that the concentrated fishing pressure from displaced herring boats out of New England is seemingly causing much of the increased effort along the New Jersey coast.

On January 6, 2002, New Jersey's Acting Governor Donald DiFrancesco signed the Menhaden Protection Bill into law which prohibits the taking of menhaden for reduction purposes (processing bunker into fish meal, fertilizer, poultry feed, etc.) in state waters. Since lobbying to get this legislation passed, RFA says the coastal striped bass fishery has virtually exploded every spring with trophy class stripers feasting on bunker schools along the Jersey beachfront from May through July

For the past two weeks however, striper fishermen working bunker schools along the Northern Coast have watched as a fleet of commercial vessels has moved inside the three-mile limit. Capt. Adam Nowalsky, Chairman of the RFA-NJ chapter said since the removal of the reduction boats 8 years, the current problem lies with the issuance of bait harvesting permits in New Jersey, those for boats who 'catch' the baits and others for boats which are permitted to 'carry' the menhaden.

"At a committee meeting of the New Jersey Marine Fisheries Council last fall, the issue was discussed about needing to limit the issuance of these permits as there was concern that vessels from New England would come down and carry the menhaden back up north to supplement their bait issues as a result of herring quota decreases," Nowalsky said. "Out-of-state boats are contributing to the problem," Nowalsky said, adding it's unclear at this time whether the New England fleet has brought their own 'catchers' or if out-of-state 'carriers' are purchasing bait from the New Jersey based bait fleet.

In March, the New Jersey Assembly unanimously passed a bill (A2304) which would restrict the issuance of these permits beginning in 2011 to only those vessels that had permits within the years 2002-2009. RFA has actively supported this legislation, and has been working for months with members of the New Jersey commercial fishing industry and various legislators to get this law passed as quickly as possible, precisely because of this bunker rodeo now taking place along the coast.

"When the New England fleet was told they wouldn't be able to harvest herring for their seasonal bait use, the writing was on the wall for everyone in the fishing industry," said Donofrio. "We've been in discussions with the New Jersey bait industry for over 8 months on how best to address this resource problem, and this bill should solve this dilemma for the future and provide for adequate forage fish levels off the Jersey Coast."

Donofrio met with Senator Robert Smith (D-District 17) Chairman of the Senate Environment and Energy Committee yesterday to discuss funding ideas for the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife,

Barnegat Bay initiatives, the reef pots bill and the Senate version of the bunker bill, S1140, which was referred to the Committee on March 22. “The senator assured us he would help get this bill out of Committee for us and to make sure this gets on the governor’s desk as soon as possible,” Donofrio said.

Sponsored in the Assembly by Matthew Milam (D-District 1), Nelson Albano (D-District 1) and Celeste Riley (D-District 3), and in the Senate by Jeff Van Drew (D-District 1), A2304/S1140 would create limited entry provisions for commercial owners looking to harvest menhaden for sale as bait, and would also limit the size and power of boats participating in the bunker harvest for bait. “At this point, the best we can do is hope to see Sen. Smith move the bill, get it passed by the Senate, and get the governor to sign it,” Nowalsky said, adding “unfortunately action could not be taken for 2010 but we expect to have this resolved next year.”

“The bait industry has to remove the bunker from the seines by hand using baskets, that’s an effort control that RFA continues to support,” said Donofrio, adding that it slows down the whole process. “The entire bait industry in New Jersey takes approximately 30 million pounds of menhaden annually from Cape May to Sandy Hook, while the reduction boats we ousted from state waters almost 10 years ago use 12-inch diameter pumps took 30 million pounds of bunker off a single stretch along Long Beach Island alone during a two-week period back in 2001.”

“The bunker are still there, so are the bass, and if the winds shift offshore as forecast, I expect much of those bunker to swim under the wind again and bunch up off the beach by week’s end,” Donofrio said. “This situation we’re experiencing with the carrier vessels is bad and we hope to fix it, but it’s certainly not like those dark days we saw in the 90’s.”

Both Donofrio and Nowalsky are expected to be in Trenton on Thursday for Sen. Smith’s Committee hearing to testify on behalf of Van Drew’s menhaden bill.

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*The Recreational Fishing Alliance is a national, grassroots political action organization representing recreational fishermen and the recreational fishing industry on marine fisheries issues. RFA’s Mission is to safeguard the rights of saltwater anglers, protect marine, boat and tackle industry jobs, and ensure the long-term sustainability of our Nation’s saltwater fisheries. For more information, call 888-JOIN-RFA or visit [www.joinrfa.org](http://www.joinrfa.org).*