



PRESS RELEASE

Recreational Fishing Alliance

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For Immediate Release
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May 21, 2010
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STRIPED BASS UNDER ATTACK FROM ASMFC MISMANAGEMENT

Despite protest from the Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA) and its allies in the recreational fishing sector, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) surprised everyone in the angling community earlier this month by voting to include a proposal to increase commercial striped bass harvest within Draft Addendum II for public hearings. According to the RFA, the purpose of the draft addendum is specifically to consider options to increase the coastal commercial quota of striped bass and revise the definition of striped bass recruitment failure.

“This proposal was not endorsed by the Striped Bass Advisory Panel, and it wasn’t supported by anyone in the recreational fishing community,” said RFA Executive Director, Jim Donofrio. “This decision is a slap in the face, and it contradicts all available data that shows that we should be doing more to protect the striped bass fishery from an illegal, unreported striped bass fishery,” Donofrio said.

For the past two seasons, RFA has been pressuring federal enforcement personnel to address illegal commercial harvest in federal waters off North Carolina and Virginia during the winter months. As early as February of 2009, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was made aware of issues with commercial trawlers working in waters more than 3 miles outside of Oregon Inlet, when a U.S. Coast Guard cutter checking fishing vessels in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) encountered two commercial vessels and a research tagging vessel. “We have confidential emails indicating the Coast Guard had ignored commercial vessels working in the EEZ, despite charges that these trawlers were loading up on illegal, spawning class stripers,” Donofrio said. “We’re finally seeing some token arrests, but these illegal, unregulated activities have gone on too long and must be stopped.”

Earlier this year, the Coast Guard stepped up enforcement efforts on illegal fishing for striped bass in federal waters, citing both recreational and commercial fishermen for illegal harvest. “It’s against the law for anyone, recreational or commercial, to target stripers in the EEZ, and until the fed can adequately enforce the rules in their own waters, it’s irresponsible to make motions at the Commission level which would lead to more overharvest in this fishery,” Donofrio said. The RFA believes there should no increases on striper harvest in either sector until the illegal and unreported fishery is officially brought under control by NOAA Fisheries.

For Jim Hutchinson, Jr., Managing Director of the RFA and President of the New York Sportfishing Federation, the ASMFC’s decision to open this discussion is especially frustrating since the motion was made by New York’s representative to the ASMFC, Pat Augustine. “The RFA had this conversation with our governor’s appointee just a few months ago, pointing specifically to the issue of the massive illegal harvest off Virginia and Carolina, coupled with the myxobacteriosis problem appearing in the Chesapeake stock,” Hutchinson said. “Once again, our representative thumbed his nose at his constituents, ignored the concerns of those he’s supposed to represent and disregarded every bit of empirical data that should’ve guided him otherwise. I hope this is the last time,” Hutchinson added.

“We’ve fought hard to protect those fish in the EEZ, and we’ll fight equally hard to make sure this proposal to increase the harvest of striped bass is defeated,” Donofrio said, adding that public comment on the draft addendum is being accepted through October 1. Details can be found at www.asmfc.org.

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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.