

ASMFC Amendment 7 Statement

The Maryland Charter Boat Association is the largest group of professional Captains on the Chesapeake Bay who promote sustainable sport fishing and local tourism. We are small business owners and family businesses that operate in your community.

Over the past two seasons we have continued to build our relationship with the State of Maryland and have participated in the FACTS reporting system as professional fishermen. The hope of our reporting is to assure fishery managers the accuracy of our data and that its punctuality occurs in real time.

In an act of preservation, in 2020 the State of Maryland acted to reduce harvest of Striped Bass by 18% and a total of 28% including Commercial harvest. Consequently, our industry's season was shortened in a three phase effort help rejuvenate the Striped Bass population. In summary: 13 days of our Spring Fishery was eliminated, 16 days of our Summer Fishery was canceled, and the last 5 days of our Winter Fishery was closed. This effort that was once available to us as anglers can also be seen in Amendment 7's public comment on page 61 based on the 2019 data set. The alterations to the season will continue into 2022.

We are thankful for our partnership with fishery management staff within the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. This partnership has afforded us the opportunity to continue to fish within our current 6 month, 3 week Striped Bass Season.

Our concern, year in and year out is what is next? What will impact our businesses? Will we be able to operate in Maryland as an industry if proposed regulations continue to shorten our seasons and daily harvest limits?

We know as an industry that we have met the proposed Option B1-A effort controls proposed by ASMFC in Amendment 7. We feel that any other additional closure in the Chesapeake Bay for the For-Hire fleet is unnecessary due to our already abbreviated season. Our industry's business model is reliant on a fishery that attempts to avoid unnecessary catch and release, or handling of Striped Bass. We are professional fishermen and utilize the best fishing practices and gear to avoid additional unnecessary discards during our trips. We feel that shifting to a one fish per angler limit for the for-hire fishery will not only result in unnecessary catch and release but will deter future customers from wanting to participate as anglers on our vessels.

Though our portion of the total Striped Bass harvest is minimal in comparison to the total data set, it should be the most accurate based on its parameters. To elaborate, as professional fishermen we have been asked over a two year period to log not only harvest data of all species through the FACTS Reporting System, but all releases, methods, and even bait caught. This comprehensive data set was recorded per trip and verified by random surveys by Maryland Department of Natural Resources employees. These employees were given our estimated check in time back at the dock with advanced notice during each trip. Our customers also took surveys after each trip when requested by state employees to verify our harvest data accuracy and their personal fishing history within the past season.

Not only have our Captains and Crew have been willing to better this fishery, our customers have devoted their time to it as well.

As Maryland Captains on the Chesapeake Bay we are the most concerned fisherman about the health of our fishery and the volatility of potential management decisions year after year. We feel that we have continued to sacrifice a large portion of our once open season, to accomplish fishery managers' goals. We feel that our For-Hire harvest data is as accurate and predictable as the commercial fishery. In comparison, we harvest roughly an estimated third of what the total commercial sector harvests annually (Number of fish Harvest by For Hire Charter Boats - Year 2018: 174,737, 2019: 167,203; 2020: 146,290, 2021: *139,460 (*as of end of November 2021) reports received April 6, 2021 & December 2021 from Public Information request). When comparing harvest records as an industry from 2018 vs 2021 's supplied data we have reduced our harvest by 25.3%.

As professional fishermen we strongly believe our release mortality rate is equivalent to or lower than the commercial fishery in Maryland. As professional fisherman we understand the correct way to handle and release fish. We are professional fisherman that hold the same credentials as all commercial fisherman, we all

are required to own a Tidal Fish License or a Guide's License to participate in our fishery. There is absolutely no logical reason why we as professional fisherman, are considered to have a higher release mortality than our colleagues in the commercial fishery. The unique ability to manage of our fishery and understanding the differences between the mortality of professional fishermen and recreational fishermen is a key principle that is only defined through Conservation Equivalency. The rationale that we are reliant on MRIP data estimates and not our own reporting harvest system creates even more division and opportunity for error in the Chesapeake Bay.

As professional fishermen we are well aware of the ever-changing dynamics of the Striped Bass Fishery on the Chesapeake Bay. We understand the regional differences and opinions that are proposed year after year. We understand the opinions of the recreational fishermen and commercial alike. We understand Maryland's uniqueness in the entirety of the Striped Bass fishery on the East Coast of the United States and support its opportunity to use conservation equivalency to manage its fishery.

We understand that personal observation of migration patterns through harvest data has changed, fishery biomass during seasons have changed with Chesapeake Bay health (as a result of depleted oxygen levels from algae blooms and pollution from multiple states), additionally predators have affected the fishery (including invasive species such as Blue Cat Fish & Snake Head, increasing observations of schools of Porpoise are natural predators and effect the location of the Striped Bass biomass in the Mid-Upper Chesapeake Bay during the Summer months, etc.), and climate change has affected the timing of the Spawning Stock Biomass, etc.

We also understand that with continued proposal of aggressive regulation it demands sacrifice as business owners. We have made the sacrifice already and continue to do so. We feel that our harvest data can be utilized to better the health of the bay and that our industry has been willing to make our best efforts to do so within reason. We feel that we are already operating within the required reduction of 15% directed trips that is proposed in Amendment 7 and the harvest data to be released in October will only support this effort made by our Captains.

We also know that the urgency and option to quickly push an objective through without public comment after October of this year is not in the interest of recreational, For-Hire, or Commercial fishermen. This should be a developed process that is given enough time to mature and allow for the participation of all parties of interest with the new data set in hand. The proposal to do so is unwise and a radical conclusion.

We support regional conservation efforts; we are stewards of Maryland's State Fish and sportsman alike. We support the betterment of the Chesapeake Bay's fishery and have done so historically through action and our recorded efforts. We understand the uniqueness of Maryland's fishery in comparison to the related Atlantic States and understand the importance of honoring conservation equivalency. We are fully vested business owners that are reliant on Maryland's State Fish in order to operate and are hopeful that our season will be restored through the principles of its current management strategy.