



November 30, 2022

Jamie Green
Commissioner
Virginia Marine Resources Commission
Building 96, 380 Fenwick Road
Fort Monroe, Virginia 23651

Dear Commissioner Green,

On behalf of the recreational fishing industry, and Chesapeake Bay anglers, the American Sportfishing Association (ASA) submits the following comments to the Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC) on the proposal to address purse seine net spills and user conflicts within the Chesapeake Bay.

ASA is the nation's recreational fishing trade association and represents sportfishing manufacturers, retailers, wholesalers, and angler advocacy groups, as well as the interests of America's 52 million recreational anglers. ASA also safeguards and promotes the social, economic, and conservation values of sportfishing in America, which results in a \$128 billion per year impact on the nation's economy.

The sportfishing community has a continued interest in the health of the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem and Atlantic menhaden play a key role as forage for many gamefish species. For years, ASA and other recreational fishing advocacy groups have been asking for regulations in the Bay that specifically address menhaden net spills, user conflicts, and the availability of menhaden as prey to important gamefish (e.g., striped bass, bluefish, red drum, cobia). Recognizing our shared responsibility for conserving fishery resources, recreational anglers have broadly supported continued regulatory actions to control recreational fishing mortality to help rebuild Bay gamefish populations in poor condition (e.g., [striped bass](#), [bluefish](#)). Rebuilding these iconic recreational fisheries is an important economic driver for Chesapeake Bay communities. Given the link between the health of predator species and the availability of forage, we support additional regulatory action to strengthen conservation of menhaden in the Bay to ensure successful rebuilding of gamefish populations.

As a first step towards accomplishing that goal, ASA supports VMRC's proposal to (1) reduce the likelihood of net spills with a one-mile purse seine buffer along the Virginia's Chesapeake Bay shoreline, (2) reduce user conflicts around the Chesapeake Bridge Tunnel with a half mile purse seine buffer, and (3) implement purse seine holiday closures to minimize the possibility of net spills during peak tourism holidays.

While net spills may be characterized as "rare events" relative to the overall number of purse seine sets, these spills continue to occur multiple times each year and clearly have the potential to impact gamefish populations with the most recent spill resulting in over 12,000 pounds of large spawning redfish as dead bycatch. The Bay is a shared public resource, and when a single industry is causing such significant

AMERICAN SPORTFISHING ASSOCIATION

1001 N. Fairfax Street, Suite 501, Alexandria, VA 22314 • 703-519-9691 • Fax: 703-519-1872
Web: www.ASAFishing.org • Email: info@ASAFishing.org

conflicts with the public, whether recreational anglers, boaters, or beachgoers, something must be done. This action is a commonsense approach to addressing a known longstanding problem of net spills and user conflicts. VMRC has implemented the use of buffers in other fisheries within the Commonwealth and area and time closures are a widely used fishery management tool.

We encourage VMRC to approve these buffers and holiday closures and work on education and outreach to all stakeholders to help improve the success of these measures. We appreciate VMRC for proposing action to address net spills and user conflicts and look forward to working with VMRC to address the larger issue of ecosystem impacts of high-volume purse seining in the Chesapeake Bay as petitioned by over 10,000 anglers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mike Leonard". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mike" being more prominent than the last name "Leonard".

Mike Leonard
Vice President, Government Affairs