

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

April 9, 2012

Capt. John V. O'Shea  
Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission  
1050 North Highland Street  
Suite 200A-N  
Arlington, VA 22201

Mr. Samuel D. Rauch, III  
National Marine Fisheries Service  
1315 East West Highway - Building SSMC3  
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Capt. O'Shea & Mr. Rauch:

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) is engaged in an historic effort to develop a catch limit-based management plan for the Atlantic menhaden fishery. While we agree this is an important development, the new management measures and potential resulting harvest cuts will significantly impact not only menhaden reduction and bait fisheries, but also some of the East Coast's most valuable fisheries, such as lobster and crab. It is therefore vitally important that the new management regime rest on the strongest possible scientific foundation.

We are concerned, therefore, that the stock assessment workshop planned for this year may not include all the latest information or incorporate recommendations for improving and fixing the stock assessment model made by the last assessment's scientific peer review panel. That panel was comprised of one state and one federal marine biologist and an international team of experts provided by the Center of Independent Experts. We are also concerned that the process for conducting the workshop may not be adequate for such an important scientific endeavor.

As to the former, University of New England biologist, Dr. James Sulikowski, conducted an aerial survey as a cooperative research project last summer to review and characterize the adult menhaden population beyond the range of the fishery. This data helps address a deficiency in the stock assessment model identified by the peer reviewers that can result in the assessment failing to account adequately, if at all, for older menhaden found off the coasts of New Jersey north through Maine. We understand that Dr. Sulikowski and other independent scientists are communicating with members of the stock assessment team to discuss this data and potential discrete model improvements.

These matters should not be excluded from consideration simply because this year's assessment would typically be a simple update. If the stock assessment model can be improved – and particularly if the model is flawed in important ways – ASMFC and National Marine Fisheries Service should allow the assessment team the full flexibility to make warranted adjustments.

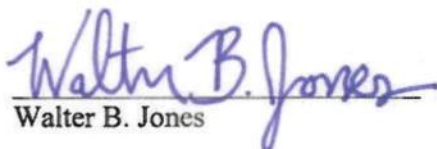
We also understand the assessment will be conducted via the internet rather than as a face-to-face meeting of the scientists involved. Such an informal process would be a first, at least for the menhaden assessment. Attempting to conduct a statistical workshop via conference call and the web impedes the scientific give and take essential to its success. We urge you to convene the customary in-person workshop that would allow the participants to work collaboratively and in a location where they have all necessary tools at their disposal.

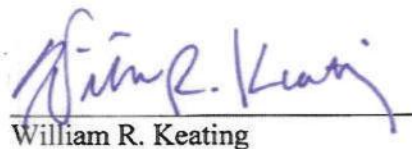
The menhaden fishery – and this stock assessment – are simply too important to the future of our fishing communities for your agencies to cut corners in the manner apparently being planned. Please report to us as quickly as possible what steps your agencies are taking to ensure the conduct of a menhaden stock assessment that is commensurate with that assessment's conservation and economic ramifications. Thank you very much for your attention to this very important matter.

Sincerely,

  
Robert J. Wittman

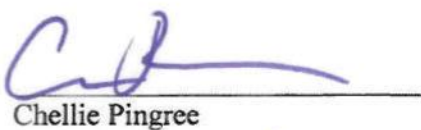
  
Michael H. Michaud

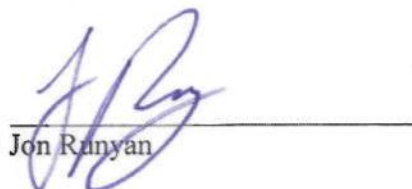
  
Walter B. Jones

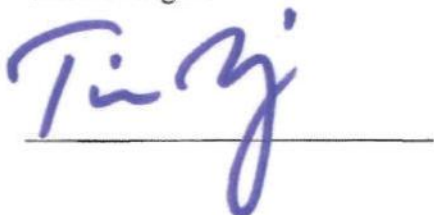
  
William R. Keating

  
Frank A. LoBiondo

  
Steven M. Palazzo

  
Chellie Pingree

  
Jon Ranyan

  
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Capt. O'Shea and Mr. Rauch

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Michael H. Michaud (ME-02)

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Steven M. Palazzo (MS-04)

Chellie Pingree (ME-01)

Jon Runyan (NJ-03)

Timothy H. Bishop (NY-01)