

March 22, 2024

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen, Chair
Commerce, Justice, Science, & Related Agencies Subcommittee
Senate Committee on Appropriations
506 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jerry Moran, Ranking Member
Commerce, Justice, Science, & Related Agencies Subcommittee
Senate Committee on Appropriations
521 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chair Shaheen and Ranking Member Moran,

The undersigned organizations write in support of prioritized funding for fisheries data collections, surveys, and assessments through the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2025.

American anglers and boaters contribute a combined \$378 billion in economic output and support 1.7 million jobs.¹² As organizations representing the outdoor recreation economy across the nation, we are dedicated to the continued support for fisheries data collection, particularly regarding various regional survey programs which are executed by NMFS to gather comprehensive data on the health of the marine fisheries and ecosystems that our community utilizes every day. NMFS also works closely with state agencies to collect fisheries data that is vital to the sustainable management of the marine stocks that our industry and coastal communities depend on for their livelihoods. Our organizations support the continued, robust funding for fisheries data collections, surveys, and assessments that have historically been implemented by NMFS.

Within that authority, we are concerned that a major data collection gap is significantly impacting the long-term sustainability of the outdoor recreation industry in the Mid-Atlantic. The Chesapeake Bay, the largest estuary in the nation and a critical nursery area for many marine species such as the iconic striped bass and blue crab, suffers from a lack of comprehensive data collection regarding the largest fishery on the Atlantic coast, the Atlantic menhaden fishery. Menhaden in the Chesapeake Bay comprise the nutritional base for lucrative species such as striped bass, cobia, red drum, and more. By providing a food source that spans the entirety of the bay region and across the Atlantic coast, menhaden support the

¹ Sportfishing in America: A Reliable Economic Force. Produced for the American Sportfishing Association by Southwick Associates via Multistate Grant #F20AP00183 awarded by the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Programs of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2020.

² National Marine Manufacturers Association 2023 Economic Impact Study:
<https://www.nmma.org/press/article/24334#:~:text=The%202023%20NMMA%20study%20reveals,2018%20to%20812%2C000%20in%202023.>

outdoor recreation economy at large, including supporting the nearly \$1.8 billion in combined economic output contributed by the Maryland and Virginia recreational fishing industries. According to the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS), “although Atlantic menhaden science has been growing and evolving for decades, the available information focused specifically on fish that seasonally inhabit the bay is limited and many unresolved questions remain.”³ The ecological and economic impacts of the largest fishery on the Atlantic coast have never been carefully studied, and they could be contributing to the decline in ecosystem productivity of the Chesapeake Bay and its associated coastal economies, including that of our own community.

Our organizations request that the Subcommittee appropriate \$2.7 million to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission through the Fisheries Data, Collections, Surveys, and Assessments PPA to complete the research outlined in the VIMS “Atlantic Menhaden Research Planning” document.

Comprehensive fisheries data collections and assessments are paramount to maintaining the economic viability of the outdoor recreation industry, our coastal communities, and our iconic marine ecosystems overall. We urge you to prioritize the continued funding for regional survey programs, including providing funding to complete the Chesapeake Bay-specific research that is necessary to ensure the long-term sustainability of the coastal economies of the Mid-Atlantic, in addition to the long-term sustainability of the Atlantic menhaden fishery and associated fisheries as well. Thank you for your leadership on this request and we look forward to working with you to support its passage in Congress.

Sincerely,

American Sportfishing Association

International Game Fish Association

Angler Action Foundation

Izaak Walton League of America

Boat Owners Association of The United States

Marine Retailers Association of the Americas

Bonefish & Tarpon Trust

National Marine Manufacturers Association

Coastal Conservation Association

National Wildlife Federation

Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation

Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

Guy Harvey Foundation

Wild Oceans

³ Latour, R.J. and J. Gartland. 2023. Atlantic Menhaden Research Planning. Report submitted by the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, William & Mary to the Virginia General Assembly and the Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources, Gloucester Point, VA. 19pp.