

Phil Zalesak
Testimony Before the Virginia House of Delegates
Agriculture Chesapeake and Natural Resources meeting
January 18, 2023

My name is Phil Zalesak and I am president of the Southern Maryland Recreational Fishing Organization with membership from both Virginia and Maryland.

I fully support both HB 1381 and HB 1383.

Atlantic menhaden are not overfished in the Atlantic Ocean.

However, based on the latest scientific, biological, and economic information, the Atlantic menhaden reduction fishery is causing localized depletion of Atlantic menhaden in the Chesapeake Bay to the detriment of fish, birds, and mammals dependent on Atlantic menhaden for their survival.

According to a 2019 study co-authored by Dr. Michael Wilberg of the Chesapeake Biological Laboratory, Atlantic Menhaden largely remained within the same coastal region from June to October. This is the principal time of intense reduction harvesting in the Chesapeake Bay. This combination facilitates localized depletion of Atlantic menhaden in the Chesapeake Bay.

Based on 50 research Dr. Bryan Watts of William and Mary has stated that reductions in menhaden stocks have caused osprey productivity to decline to below DDT-era rates. These rates are insufficient to support the osprey population within the main stem of the Bay.

Dr. Noah Bressman of Salisbury University has stated that Virginia based menhaden fishery is overfishing the stock in and around the Chesapeake Bay, which is preventing the important forage fish from making its way into the Bay and its tributaries.

Based on this latest science, Virginia needs to limit the Atlantic menhaden reduction fishery to federal waters east of the western boundary of the Exclusive Economic Zone.

I thank you for your time.