

RESOLUTION

A RESOLUTION OF THE NORTHAMPTON COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS APPROVING THE COUNTY'S POSITION THAT INDUSTRIAL ATLANTIC MENHADEN FISHING SHOULD BE PROHIBITED WITHIN THE WATERS OF THE CHESAPEAKE BAY AND THREE MILES OF ALL LANDS OF THE COMMONWEALTH AND REQUESTING THAT THE VIRGINIA MARINE RESOURCE COMMISSION AND STATE AGENCIES LEGALLY ESTABLISH AND ENFORCE A PROHIBITION OF THE INDUSTRIAL ATLANTIC MENHADEN FISHERY WITHIN THE WATERS OF THE CHESAPEAKE BAY AND WITHIN THREE MILES OF ANY LANDS OF THE COMMONWEALTH.

WHEREAS, Atlantic menhaden are an ecologically essential keystone species of the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem that support commercially and recreationally important fisheries, maintain water quality by filtering nutrients from the water, and provide essential nutrients for numerous species in the bay food chain; and

WHEREAS, industrial menhaden fishing in the Chesapeake Bay negatively impacts Northampton County by reducing the stock of menhaden available to support important fisheries and wildlife, reducing the populations of recreational and commercial fish species caught in purse seine nets as by-catch, and reducing the population of predator species such as osprey, dolphins, sharks, humpback whales, striped bass, redfish, weakfish, and speckled trout, all of which contribute to the general and tourism economy of Northampton County; and

WHEREAS, industrial menhaden fishing operates on a tactical level where they use spotter airplanes that can quickly cover the entire Chesapeake Bay in a matter of hours, the planes then locate schools of menhaden by air, and then quickly dispatch their boat fleet to extract schools of menhaden from the Chesapeake Bay with purse seine nets. By design, these highly efficient industrial extraction methods cause localized depletion of Atlantic menhaden in the Chesapeake Bay and it is not known how long it may take the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem to recover from excessive depletion of biomass, and whether a full recovery is even possible; and

WHEREAS, the Virginia Secretary of Natural Resources, Virginia Marine Resources Commission, and members of the Atlantic Menhaden Technical Committee of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission can not provide Northampton County scientific assurance that the spatial or seasonal stock of menhaden in the Chesapeake Bay is healthy, and the impact of localized depletion due to industrialized Atlantic menhaden fishing techniques in the Chesapeake Bay (VIMS et al. [2023](#)); and

WHEREAS, both the Virginia Institute of Marine Science and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources published record low striped bass recruitment numbers for 2023, this is the fifth consecutive year of juvenile striped bass numbers being below the average and the second lowest striped bass index ever recorded since 1957 (MDNR et al. [2023](#), Small et al. [2023](#), VIMS et al. [2023](#)); and

Whereas, research suggests industrial reduction menhaden fishing in the Chesapeake Bay could be responsible for a decline in striped bass (Buchheister et al. 2017, TRCP et al. 2019). The Virginia Institute of Marine Science linked striped bass starvation to a decline of forage food in the Chesapeake Bay, and starvation as a cause for predisposing fish to Mycobacteriosis, locally referred to as fish wasting disease (Cardinal et al. 2001); and

WHEREAS, the Virginia Institute of Marine Science recorded industrial menhaden trawlers catching striped bass in their purse nets in the Chesapeake Bay, the average size of the striped bass caught by these industrial menhaden trawlers was over 34 inches, well above the 31 inches established by the ASMFC, suggesting that the striped bass being caught by industrial menhaden trawlers as by-catch are of size to be important breeders for striped bass recovery (Kirkley et al. 1995, ASMF et al. 2023); and

WHEREAS, in 2023, the Center for Conservation at the College of William and Mary published record low osprey chick recruitment numbers in the Chesapeake Bay, the lowest recruitment numbers since 1970 as a result of starvation, a reproduction number that is lower than what occurred at any time during the DDT era and a much lower rate than is sustainable for the Bay population of Osprey (Hafner et al. 2023); and

WHEREAS, industrial menhaden fishing has caused fish kills and fish spills that have impacted public beaches, private property, and public health in Northampton County; and

WHEREAS, industrial menhaden fishing adversely impacts the economic well-being of Northampton County by disrupting the health of our local commercial industry; and

WHEREAS, industrial menhaden fishing adversely impacts the economic well-being of Northampton County by disrupting our local sport fishing industry; and

WHEREAS, industrial menhaden fishing adversely impacts the economic well-being of Northampton County by disrupting our local tourism industry, due to the adverse effects of fish spills, fish kills, the persistent rotting odor of fish spills and fish kills, and reduced sport fishing; and

WHEREAS, all other states on the Atlantic Coast have removed industrial menhaden fishing from their bays and state waters, and have now recorded positive ecological and economic responses in doing so (Main et al. 2023); and

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Northampton County Board of Supervisors, this 9th day of January, 2024, establishes the County's position that industrial

Atlantic menhaden reduction fishing should be prohibited within the waters of the Chesapeake Bay and three miles of all lands on the Commonwealth and requests that the Virginia Marine Resources Commission and state agencies legally establish and enforce a prohibition of the industrial Atlantic menhaden reduction fishery within the waters of the Chesapeake Bay and within three miles of any lands of the Commonwealth.



Northampton County Board of Supervisors

The undersigned Clerk of the Northampton County Board of Supervisors hereby certifies that the above is a true copy of a resolution adopted by the Northampton County Board of Supervisors on January 9, 2024.



Clerk, Northampton County Board of Supervisors