

April 17, 2019

Chairman James S. Gilmore, Jr.  
Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission  
1050 N. Highland Street, Suite 200A  
Arlington, VA 22201

Dear Chairman Gilmore:

We are writing today to express our serious concerns regarding the current status of Atlantic striped bass, and to request that the Commission take immediate action to prevent further depletion and start rebuilding striped bass stocks. As you know, a recent benchmark stock assessment found that striped bass are overfished and that overfishing is occurring. Even more troubling, new data show that striped bass spawning stock biomass has remained below its critical lower threshold since 2013, and the fishing mortality rate has remained above its upper threshold since 2010. It is evident that status quo management will be inadequate to return the striped bass stock to target levels of biomass and fishing mortality indicative of a healthy fishery.

For those reasons, we believe that it is absolutely necessary for the Commission to adopt a new Addendum to Amendment 6 of the Atlantic Striped Bass Fishery Management Plan (FMP) no later than its 2019 Annual Meeting in October, with the goal of significantly reducing fishing mortality. We understand that instituting a full suite of conservation and management measures will require a new Amendment to the FMP. However, it is clear that we cannot afford to continue unsustainable levels of fishing while we work through the lengthy Amendment process. Amendment development should begin concurrently with development of an emergency Addendum, and should reject half measures in favor of strong and enforceable actions that firmly place the striped bass stock on the road to recovery.

While we do not prejudge which management tools could most effectively achieve harvest reductions, we agree that all options should be on the table, including measures to shorten fishing seasons, reduce release mortality, and ensure that more of the large female fish that are critical to spawning success remain in the water. Further, we believe that individual states should consider taking immediate measures to reduce fishing mortality in upcoming fishing seasons that occur before a new Addendum is implemented. We urge the Commission to incentivize states to be proactive by signaling that any reductions achieved during that period will be credited toward states' conservation responsibilities under a new Addendum.

Scientific evidence and what fishermen in our states are seeing on the water tell us that bold action to protect striped bass is long overdue. Rebuilding striped bass stocks and sustaining them at target levels of abundance is incredibly important to fisheries in both of our states. We urge

the Commission to implement measures that will reduce striped bass harvests to sustainable levels as quickly as possible.

Sincerely,



Katherine Dykes  
Commissioner, Department of Energy and Environmental Protection  
State of Connecticut



Matthew A. Beaton  
Secretary, Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs  
Commonwealth of Massachusetts



Matthew J. Strickler  
Secretary of Natural Resources  
Commonwealth of Virginia