



Dear Atlantic Menhaden Management Commissioners, and ASMFC staff:

7/28/20

I'm writing to urge the Atlantic Menhaden Management Board to adopt ecological reference points (ERPs) for coastwide Atlantic menhaden management. This approach to fisheries management explicitly incorporates menhaden's role as a forage fish and represents a monumental development for fisheries management in the United States.

The best available science supports the use of ERPs for menhaden management. Unlike single-species management, ERPs definitively account for the important role that menhaden fulfil in estuarine and marine ecosystems. The use of ERPs represents a commitment that will protect predator populations by leaving more forage fish in the ocean and ensuring that fish stocks never get too low.

Menhaden serve as a critical food source for a wide variety of fishes, marine mammals and bird species as well as for commercially and recreationally valuable species. Now that peer-reviewed multispecies science is available for menhaden, managers need to adopt ERPs, leaving enough menhaden in the water to sustain its vital role in the ecosystem and allow this vital species to return to abundance throughout its full range.

The ASMFC has an opportunity to set a strong precedent with regard to the management of forage fish such as Atlantic menhaden. Adopting ERPs and then making a commitment to conservative catch levels moving forward will establish the Commission as a leader on this issue, using cutting-edge science for conservation and ecosystem-based fishery management.

Stakeholders have shown strong interest in the management of Atlantic menhaden for the past 10 years and their concerns have been highlighted by coast-wide coalitions and grassroots activism to protect this species from overharvest. As managers, you must recognize the concern of stakeholders and the role that menhaden perform in the ecosystem.

Riverkeeper's petition was sent out to our membership approximately 5 days ago and we acquired 620 signatures. Had we run this longer, we would have had numbers well into the thousands.

Please note, that our members are extremely concerned about the fate of menhaden and how they are managed. Our ecosystem thrives because of the abundance of forage fishes and the public is more informed than ever before.

Sincerely,

George Jackman, PhD

Senior Habitat Restoration Manager

Riverkeeper Inc.

