

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 9, 2026

Joe Cimino
Chair
Atlantic Menhaden Management Board
Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission
1050 N. Highland St., Suite 200 A-N
Arlington, VA 22201

Dear Chair Cimino,

The Chesapeake Bay is an especially important habitat for Atlantic menhaden because, as the nation's largest estuary, it provides a major nursery area for menhaden and many other important species managed by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission). Conservation-minded management principles are critical for the Chesapeake Bay menhaden; menhaden management not only impacts countless communities and businesses reliant on an abundant menhaden population, but also the health of other wildlife populations up and down the Atlantic coast that depend on this fish species for survival. During its consideration of updated management strategies for Atlantic menhaden in the Chesapeake Bay and coastwide, the Commission must prioritize an ecosystem-based management approach that supports long-term menhaden abundance and sustainable commercial and recreational fisheries. We urge the Commission to move forward with the strongest menhaden protections proposed in the Commission's Draft Addendum II, as well as with precautionary management measures for the Atlantic coastwide quota.

Menhaden are called "the most important fish in the sea" for good reason. As a forage species, menhaden perform the critical task of consuming plankton and turning it into energy-rich animal protein that nourishes other wildlife. From iconic Chesapeake Bay fish species like striped bass (rockfish) – which are one of the most popular recreational fish species along the Atlantic, accounting for \$7.7 billion in GDP annually¹ – to birds of prey such as osprey and eagles, sea turtles, and even marine mammals like whales and dolphins, a wide variety of animals depend on menhaden as a food source. As a result, decreases in menhaden population have serious implications for other species; for example, there is strong evidence linking declining menhaden populations to recent declines in osprey reproduction in the Chesapeake Bay.² Given the importance of menhaden to the health of the Chesapeake Bay and the entire marine food web, the Commission must carefully consider the ecosystem-level impacts of Atlantic menhaden

¹ "The Economic Contributions of Recreational and Commercial Striped Bass Fishing," The McGraw Center for Conservation Leadership. 2019. https://mcgraw.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/McGraw-Striped-Bass-Report-FINAL_compressed.pdf

² "New Research Shows a Troubling Trend for Chesapeake Bay Osprey," Eastern Ecological Science Center. U.S. Geological Survey. June 17, 2026. <https://www.usgs.gov/centers/eesc/news/new-research-shows-a-troubling-trend-chesapeake-bay-osprey>

harvest in their management decisions and promote risk-averse strategies that prioritize the ecological benefits menhaden provide.

It is our view that Atlantic menhaden are a public resource that benefit Atlantic coast communities in many ways, and so managing this species for long-term sustainability is key. A robust menhaden population is necessary to sustain all menhaden-dependent jobs, including those that rely on menhaden for bait, such as in the culturally significant Chesapeake Bay blue crab fishery and other commercial and recreational fisheries up and down the Atlantic coast. Left in the water, menhaden also support a highly productive ecosystem and provide a key food source for other commercially and recreationally valuable fish species – such as striped bass, bluefish, weakfish, and bluefin tuna – so it is important that the Commission take into account how menhaden management measures will impact both the health of menhaden and non-menhaden fish populations.

We support the Commission's continued use of ecological reference points – such as striped bass – to guide Atlantic menhaden management decisions, and we encourage the Commission to adhere to the principles of ecosystem-based fishery management. By accounting for Atlantic menhaden's role as prey for Atlantic coast species that depend on it for survival, the Commission can help to ensure a balanced approach to Atlantic menhaden management.

Ultimately, science-based decision-making is critical, which is why we fought to secure funding for Chesapeake Bay Atlantic Menhaden abundance research in the FY26 appropriations bill. We look forward to seeing the results of this study, which will provide critical information to inform future management decisions.

In the meantime, worrisome signs in the Chesapeake Bay – from dwindling osprey populations to reduced bait fishery landings – indicate that Atlantic Menhaden populations may be declining in the Bay, underscoring the importance of strategic, risk-averse management decisions today. Until better menhaden abundance data is available to inform management decisions, the Commission must put in place additional precautionary management measures, using the ecological reference point target as a goal, to ease pressure on vulnerable species that depend on menhaden.

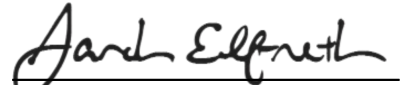
We urge the Commission to implement strong protections for Atlantic menhaden in order to support a sustainable, abundant menhaden population that can benefit all the fisheries and communities that depend on it.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and your efforts to sustainably manage Atlantic Menhaden in a manner that supports both the environment and local communities.

Sincerely,



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Sarah Elfreth
Member of Congress



Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator



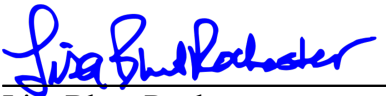
Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



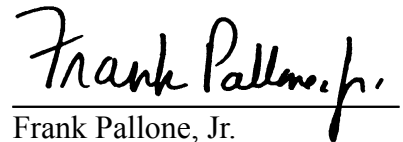
Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Angela D. Alsobrooks
United States Senator



Lisa Blunt Rochester
United States Senator



Frank Pallone, Jr.
Member of Congress



Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
Member of Congress

cc: ASMFC Atlantic Menhaden Management Board Members
Daniel J. McKiernan, ASMFC Chair
Eugenio Piñeiro Soler, Assistant Administrator for NOAA Fisheries
Brian Nesvik, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service