MID-ATLANTIC
FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

PRESS RELEASE

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Council Votes to Initiate Interagency Working Group on River Herring and Shad

Philadelphia, PA This week the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council voted to address additional conservation of river herring and shad through an interagency working group. Once abundant throughout the region, river herring (alewives and blueback) and shad (American and hickory) populations have declined to historic lows in recent decades as a result of habitat loss, overfishing, and other factors. Their depletion has sparked serious concern among scientists, managers, environmental groups, fishermen, and the general public.

The Council has been working for several years to develop management measures to help assist the recovery of river herring and shad populations. In June 2012, the Council approved a suite of measures designed to reduce and monitor incidental catch of river herring and shad in the longfin squid and Atlantic mackerel fisheries, including a cap to directly limit river herring and shad catch in the mackerel fishery. At the same meeting, the Council voted to consider adding river herring and shad as stocks managed under the Atlantic Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP).

After extensive discussion, public testimony, and consideration of more than 37,000 public comments during this week's meeting in Philadelphia, PA, the Council determined that additional management of river herrings and shads under an FMP was neither required nor appropriate at this time. Instead, the Council adopted a motion to establish a working group composed of regional, state, and Federal management partners that will work to comprehensively address river herring and shad mortality and stock status throughout their range. The Council's decision was based on a range of considerations related to ongoing river herring and shad conservation and management efforts, including:

1. There are many ongoing river herring and shad conservation efforts at various levels which are already coordinated by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) and NOAA Fisheries;
2. The Commission and states have recently increased their control of state landings;
3. The pending catch caps for river herring and shad in the Atlantic mackerel and Atlantic herring fisheries will control fishing mortality of river herring and shad in Federal waters;
4. NOAA Fisheries recently found that river herrings are not endangered or threatened and that coastwide abundances of river herrings appear stable or increasing;
5. Additional research into stock abundance is needed to establish biological reference points; and
6. NOAA Fisheries has recently committed to expanded engagement in river herring conservation.

The Council will review the progress of the working group on a regular basis, with the first review occurring at the June 2014 Council meeting. In three years, the Council will conduct a formal evaluation of the effectiveness of the approved working group approach and determine if it is appropriate, or if a different strategy is required to protect river herring and shad. The Council is also initiating a framework that would improve precision and increase accountability in the river herring and shad cap for the mackerel fishery. A decision on this framework is expected at the February 2014 Council meeting.

For additional information and related documents, visit http://www.mafmc.org/msb/am15.