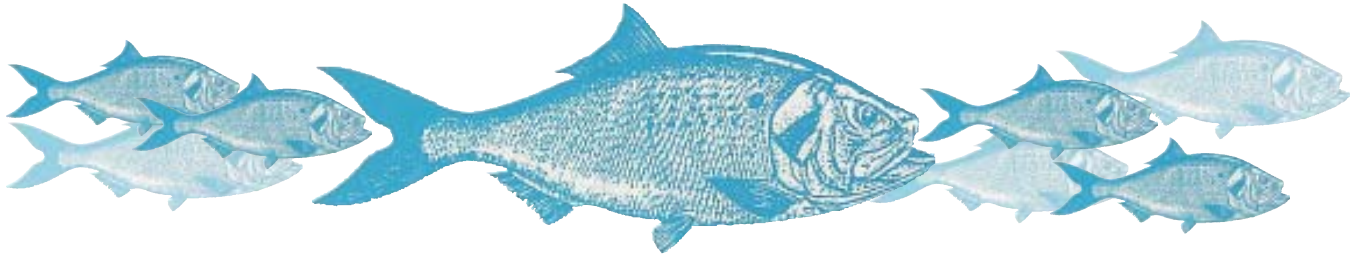


# Coastal Conservation Association Virginia



## Menhaden Position Paper

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It is often thought that menhaden are a commercial species of little value to the recreational fishery, other than those caught for bait. Menhaden are primarily harvested by the commercial industry for industrial-scale fish meal and fish oil production, with a growing number used as bait for various commercial fishery uses such as crabs and lobsters.

CCA VA believes menhaden are also among the most important species for recreational fishermen and the overall health of the Chesapeake Bay. They are one of the primary forage species for a variety of important recreational species. In historic numbers, they played an important role in filtering estuarine water. In short, they are one of the key components of the estuarine food web.

Management now calls for maintaining an adequate spawning stock biomass (SSB) and allowing harvest at a mortality rate that will yield the most pounds. CCA VA believes this approach, which has been used on nearly every commercial species over the past 30 years, is particularly flawed for menhaden. CCA VA believes management should focus on maintaining a population of menhaden that allows them to fulfill their important roles as forage fish, filter feeder, as well as commercial harvest.

Landing patterns clearly show a shift to the menhaden in the Chesapeake Bay. In the 1950s and 1960s the Chesapeake Bay accounted for about 10 percent of the coast-wide harvest, by the 1990s it accounted for nearly 60 percent. The coast-wide harvest of menhaden during those times averaged 581,000 tons from 1955 to 1965 and 331,000 tons from 1990 to 2000. Thus, even while coast-wide landings have decreased, the percentage of fish taken from the Chesapeake Bay has increased to more than 50 percent of the coast-wide landings.

The spawning stock biomass of the menhaden population has also dropped significantly. During the last 10 years, it has fallen to about 30 percent of what it was during the period from 1955 to 1965. In fact, the

present SSB target is approximately 33 percent of the average SSB during the late 1950s. The current management plan's artificially low SSB has not set off a "trigger" in the plan that would cause management action.

CCA VA believes menhaden should not only have sensible mortality and SSB thresholds, but also a population threshold and target. CCA VA is concerned that the removal rate from the Chesapeake Bay (75 percent of the entire coast-wide harvest in 2003) is too high for menhaden to fulfill their role as a forage species and filter feeder.

To ensure Menhaden are adequately managed for these purposes, CCA VA is working on two fronts:

1) **Virginia General Assembly** – Through the introduction of legislation, CCA VA is asking the General Assembly to move menhaden management to the Virginia Marine Resources Commission. Menhaden is the only species currently managed by the legislature and this management structure is not flexible enough to address management measures handed down by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) on a timely basis. Also, the science-based management approach of the ASMFC is better implemented through a professional agency.

2) **ASMFC** – CCA is asking the Menhaden Management Board to do three things. First, determine the biomass of menhaden in Chesapeake Bay throughout the year and the biomass necessary to serve their role as a primary forage species for healthy populations of piscivorous species such as striped bass, summer flounder, weakfish, bluefish, etc. Second, determine the biomass of menhaden in Chesapeake Bay necessary to serve their role as a primary filter feeder. Third, determine an allowable harvest of menhaden within the Chesapeake Bay and other geographic regions.