



# News Release

## Coastal Conservation Association

6919 Portwest, Suite 100, Houston, TX 77024

Email: [twvenker@joincca.org](mailto:twvenker@joincca.org)

Website: [www.joincca.org](http://www.joincca.org)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Feb. 11, 2010

CONTACT: Ted Venker, 1-800-201-FISH

### **ASMFC Takes Wrong Turn on Striped Bass**

*Signs pointing to cause for grave concern met with proposal to up commercial harvest*

After hearing a litany of significant concerns about the health of the striped bass population presented by its own Technical Committee and by law enforcement personnel, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's (ASMFC) Striped Bass Management Board did the last thing anyone expected at its meeting last week - directing staff to draft an addendum to the management plan which would increase the coastal commercial striped bass harvest.

The stunning turn of events left conservationists shocked at the Board's apparent disregard for strong evidence pointing to numerous problems with the Atlantic striped bass population. Unlike the 1970s when rampant overfishing was the primary cause of the stock's crash, the current picture painted by scientists and officers is all the more bleak because of the wide variety of factors that are negatively impacting striped bass.

"This is just the latest indication that the ASMFC has lost its way as an agency committed to proper resource management," said Charles Witek, chairman of CCA's Atlantic Fisheries Committee. "As bad off as the stock was in the late '70s, the fix was rather straight-forward. What we are looking at today could be much more difficult to reverse. The very last thing anyone needs to discuss during this time of uncertainty is increasing commercial harvest."

Among the information presented to managers was a report on the declining trend in the striped bass Juvenile Abundance Index, a report from law enforcement personnel on suspected "significant and unreported" poaching in the Exclusive Economic Zone, and a report on the potentially devastating impact of *Mycobacteriosis* in Chesapeake Bay, the primary striped bass spawning ground for the entire Atlantic Coast, where 70 percent of the fish sampled had lesions associated with the disease. In aquaculture, *Mycobacteriosis* infections are virtually always fatal, and since infected striped bass that are tagged and subsequently recovered never show any signs of recovery, the disease has dire implications for striped bass everywhere on the coast.

Such reports by fisheries professionals, viewed with the well-documented decline in spawning stock abundance and decreasing recreational harvest at the northern end of the striped bass' range, paint a troubling picture of the species' future.

"This stock has problems mounting on all fronts, and managers seem content to wring everything they can from it before the party ends," said Richen Brame, CCA's Atlantic Fisheries director. "This is not the stance anglers have come to expect from the same commission that was widely credited with making the hard decisions needed to save striped bass just over three decades ago. They say those who forget history are doomed to repeat it, and that is a road anglers don't want to go down again."

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*CCA is the largest marine resource conservation group of its kind in the nation. With almost 100,000 members in 17 state chapters, CCA has been active in state, national and international fisheries management issues since 1977. For more information visit the CCA Newsroom at [www.JoinCCA.org](http://www.JoinCCA.org).*