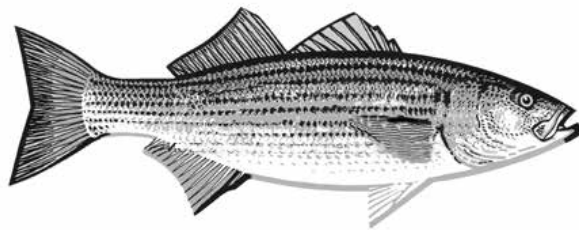




**Coastal Conservation Association
Angler's Guide to the
Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission
Atlantic Striped Bass Draft Addendum VI**



Coastal Conservation Association Comments on Atlantic Striped Bass Draft Addendum VI

From CCA's Angler's Guide to Amendment 6 - 2002

CCA believes the Amendment 5 mortality target of $F=0.31$ is too high (the mortality target is a measure of the numbers of fish that can be taken without harming the stock). The population growth has slowed since Amendment 5 was implemented in 1995 (Figure 1). Another, more insidious problem is that the Amendment 5 mortality rate is too high to allow the age structure of striped bass to fill out. Striped bass live naturally to age 25 or more.

Fishing at the present rate is effectively cropping the age structure to about age 15-17. Since Amendment 5, the number of age 10+ fish has declined. We believe it is critical that the target fishing mortality rate be lowered in order to allow more fish to grow to those older, larger age classes

Why is this important? The primary reason is to create a stable spawning stock of healthy fish that can withstand several years of recruitment failure, a natural occurrence in striped bass. We believe an expanded age structure with more fish over age 15 will provide an essential safety net for the population to see it through bad recruitment years or catastrophic events. While striped bass females are 100% mature at age 10, some begin producing eggs much earlier. Thus at present over 60% of the estimated spawning stock is composed of fish under 10 years old. We prefer that the spawning stock have a larger component of the fish that survived longer than 15 years. This way, the more successful females, the ones that lived the longest, will be major contributors to the spawning stock and pass those successful genetic traits along to future generations.

These words are as true today as they were 17 years ago. Please note the Fishing Mortality Rates (F) in Amendment 6 and those contemplated in Addendum 6 are relative to the estimated spawning stock biomass at recovery in 1995 generated in each stock assessment; the values may change but the end result is the same. Lowering F will have the same beneficial effect now as it would have then.

BACKGROUND

Striped bass are one of the most sought-after fish on the Atlantic coast, and a support vital fisheries in state waters from North Carolina to Maine. According to the latest NOAA Fisheries data, striped bass are the number one species caught recreationally in the country, in terms of pounds caught.

Striped bass are a long-lived, anadromous species, which means they return to a freshwater river annually from the ocean to spawn. Conditions have to be near perfect for them to have a successful spawn and generate an above average year class, which is why they have evolved to live 25-plus years – to withstand several years of below average recruitment.

These swings in recruitment are clearly noted in data used for managing this fishery, and striped bass anglers have a front row seat for these variable recruitment patterns, and the obvious or not so obvious changes in local abundance based on a number of factors.

Adult striped bass live in the ocean for most of the year, spending the summer generally off the New England coastline and the winter off the Mid-Atlantic. The adults migrate up their natal river in the spring to spawn. After spawning, the young migrate to the estuary at the mouth of the natal river and spend several years there. They begin immigrating to the ocean to join the adult stock at about age 5 and are mostly gone from the bays and estuaries by age 7 (approx. 28")

This coastal stock moves up the Atlantic coast in the summer and back south during the winter. Through their annual migration, and life cycle, the striped bass stock is subject to intense fishing pressure. Picture the striped bass population as a giant amoeba that moves up and down the Atlantic coast right next to the most populous coastal areas in the country.

The Atlantic striped bass stock is fished on 12 months out the year, and over time, has withstood this pressure remarkably well.

CURRENT STATUS

By many accounts, striped bass populations have been on the decline for a number of years. Last winter, the 2018 benchmark stock assessment officially painted a concerning picture for the striped bass population. The stock assessment, which was accepted for management use, indicates that the striped bass stock is overfished and is experiencing overfishing. These two terms mean that the estimated spawning stock biomass(SSB) of the stock has fallen below levels set within the current striped bass management plan, and that current fishing mortality(F) levels are too high. While this may or may not relate to your angling experience, this status has triggered management action.

PROPOSED MANAGEMENT ACTION

The Striped Bass Management Board has approved Draft Addendum VI to Amendment 6 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Striped Bass for public comment. This is an action that aims to end overfishing by returning fishing mortality (F) to the target levels within one year, as prescribed by the current management plan.

The Draft Addendum proposes management options for both commercial and recreational sectors in the ocean and in Chesapeake Bay in order to reduce total fishery removals by 18% relative to 2017 levels. The proposed measures include reduced quotas for commercial fisheries, and changes in bag limits, minimum sizes, and slot size limits for the recreational sector. The Draft Addendum also includes options to consider mandatory circle hook use to reduce deep hooking mortality experienced by anglers using live or dead bait.

The full Draft Addendum VI can be found here:

http://www.asmfc.org/uploads/file/5d5c081eStripedBassDraftAddVI_PublicComment_Aug2019.pdf

PUBLIC HEARINGS & TALKING POINTS

ASMFC staff working in cooperation with state agencies, has scheduled at least one public meeting in each state represented on the Striped Bass Management Board.

The full hearings schedule can be found here: <http://www.asmfc.org/calendar/>

CCA SUPPORTS THE FOLLOWING

- We commend ASMFC for taking immediate action to end overfishing.
- CCA supports Option 2 – Equal Percent Reductions for all sectors. All sectors should take equal reductions as a matter of fairness and equity.
- CCA has long supported reducing fishing mortality to provide for a greater abundance and develop a stock of larger, older fish. Thus, we support options that meet or exceed the 18% minimum reduction as provided for in Addendum VI, and support any proposed action with a higher probability of reducing fishing mortality.
- CCA supports conservation equivalency measures that meet or exceed the 18% reduction for all sectors, and are approved by the Technical Committee and SB Board.
- CCA supports the mandatory use of circle hooks when using natural bait as a matter of principle. All states should have monitoring programs, and enforcement plans in place so that conservation gains from circle hooks are realized.

States Schedule Public Hearings on Atlantic Striped Bass Draft Addendum VI

Arlington, VA – The Commission’s Atlantic Striped Bass Management Board releases Draft Addendum VI to Amendment 6 of the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Striped Bass for public comment. Atlantic coastal states from Maine through North Carolina, including Pennsylvania, the District of Columbia, and the Potomac River Fisheries Commission, have scheduled their hearings to gather public input on Draft Addendum VI. The details of those hearings follow. Massachusetts is still scheduling its hearings; a subsequent release will announce the details of those hearings once they are finalized.

Maine Department of Marine Resources

October 1, 2019 at 6 PM

Kennebunk Town Hall – Room 300

1 Summer Street

Kennebunk, Maine

Contact: Megan Ware at 207.446.0932

October 2, 2019 at 6:30 PM

Yarmouth Town Hall - Log Cabin

196 Main Street

Yarmouth, Maine

Contact: Megan Ware at 207.446.0932

New Hampshire Fish and Game

October 1, 2019 at 7 PM

Urban Forestry Center

45 Elwyn Road

Portsmouth, New Hampshire

Contact: Doug Grout at 603.868.1095

Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries

October 2, 2019 at 6 PM

Crowne Plaza Woburn

15 Middlesex Canal Park Drive

Woburn, Massachusetts

Contact: Mike Armstrong at 978.282.0308, ext. 109

October 3, 2019 at 6 PM

MA Maritime Academy, Admiral’s Hall

101 Academy Drive

Buzzards Bay, Massachusetts

Contact: Mike Armstrong at 978.282.0308, ext. 109

Rhode Island Division of Fish & Wildlife

September 24, 2019 at 6 PM

University of Rhode Island Bay Campus

Corless Auditorium

South Ferry Road

Narragansett, Rhode Island

Contact: Nicole Lengyel Costa at 401.423.1940

Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection

September 23, 2019 at 7 PM

Marine Headquarters, Boating Education Center

333 Ferry Road

Old Lyme, Connecticut

Contact: Justin Davis at 860.434.6043

September 25, 2019 at 7 PM

Port 5 Hall, 69 Brewster Street

Bridgeport, Connecticut

Contact: Justin Davis at 860.434.6043

NEW LOCATION: New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC)

September 4, 2019 from 6 to 9 PM

Ballroom at Bethpage State Park Clubhouse

Bethpage State Park

99 Quaker Meetinghouse Road

Farmingdale, New York

Contact: Maureen Davidson at 631.444.0483

September 12, 2019 from 6 to 9 PM

NYSDEC Region 3 Office

21 South Putt Corners Road

New Paltz, New York

Contact: Gregg Kenney at 845.256.3199

New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife

September 3, 2019 from 6 to 8:30 PM

Roselle Park Borough Hall

110 East Westfield Avenue

Roselle Park, New Jersey

Contact: Heather Corbett at 609.748.2020

September 4, 2019 from 6 to 8:30 PM

Ocean City Public Library

1725 Simpson Avenue

Ocean City, New Jersey

Contact: Heather Corbett at 609.748.2020

September 12, 2019 from 6 to 8:30 PM

Bay Avenue Community Center

775 East Bay Avenue

Manahawkin, New Jersey

Contact: Heather Corbett at 609.748.2020

Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission

August 28, 2019 from 7 to 9 PM

Silver Lake Nature Center

1306 Bath Road

Bristol, Pennsylvania

Contact: Andrew Shiels at 814.359.5181

Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control

August 29, 2019 at 6 PM

DNREC Auditorium

89 Kings Highway

Dover, Delaware

Contact: John Clark at 302.739.9914

Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Fisheries Service

September 25, 2019 from 6 to 8 PM

Calvary United Methodist Church (Basement Room)

301 Rowe Boulevard

Annapolis, Maryland

Contact: Michael Luisi at 410.260.8341

Virginia Marine Resources Commission

September 9, 2019 at 6:30 PM

Virginia Marine Resources Commission

380 Fenwick Road, Fort Monroe

Hampton, Virginia

Contact: Alex Aspinwall or Pat Geer at 757.247.2200

Potomac River Fisheries Commission

September 10, 2019, at 6 PM

222 Taylor Street

Colonial Beach, Virginia

Contact: Martin Gary at 804.224.7148

District of Columbia Department of Energy and Environment

September 12, 2019, at 6 PM

Aquatic Resources Education Center

1900 Anacostia Drive

Washington, District of Columbia

Contact: Julia Robey Christian at 202.450.7878

North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries

September 11, 2019 at 6:30 PM

Dare County Administration Building

Commissioners Meeting Room

954 Marshall C. Collins Drive

Manteo, North Carolina

Contact: Chris Batsavage at 252.808.8009

Draft Addendum VI was initiated in response to the 2018 Benchmark Stock Assessment, which indicates the resource is overfished and experiencing overfishing. The Draft Addendum explores a range of management alternatives designed to end overfishing and reduce fishing mortality to the target level in 2020.

The Draft Addendum proposes management options for both commercial and recreational sectors in the ocean and in Chesapeake Bay in order to reduce total fishery removals by 18% relative to 2017 levels. The proposed measures include reduced quotas for commercial fisheries, and changes in bag limits, minimum sizes, and slot size limits for the recreational sector. Since catch and release practices represent a significant component of overall fishing mortality, the Draft Addendum also explores the mandatory use of circle hooks when fishing with bait to reduce release mortality in recreational striped bass fisheries.

Draft Addendum VI is available at http://www.asmfc.org/files/PublicInput/StripedBassDraftAddVI_PublicComment_Aug2019.pdf or via the Commission's website at <http://www.asmfc.org/about-us/public-input>. Fishermen and other stakeholders are encouraged to provide input on Draft Addendum VI either by attending state public hearings or providing written comment. Public comment will be accepted until 5 PM (EST) on October 7, 2019 and should be sent to Max Appelman, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, 1050 N. Highland St, Suite A-N, Arlington, VA 22201; 703.842.0741 (FAX) or at comments@asmfc.org (Subject line: Striped Bass Draft Addendum VI).

If your organization is planning to release an action alert related to the Draft Addendum, please contact Max Appelman at mappelman@asmfc.org prior to its release. The Board will meet at the Commission's Annual Meeting in October to review public comment and consider final approval of the Addendum.

