



November 30, 2022

Jamie Green
Commissioner
Virginia Marine Resources Commission
Building 96, 380 Fenwick Road
Fort Monroe, Virginia 23651

Dear Commissioner Green,

On behalf of the recreational boating industry and boating businesses surrounding the Chesapeake Bay, we submit the following comments to the Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC) on the proposal to address purse sein net spills and user conflict within the Chesapeake Bay.

MRAA is the leading trade association of North American small businesses that sell and service new and pre-owned recreational boats and operate marinas, boatyards, and accessory stores. MRAA represents more than 1,100 individual member retail locations and has 12 members in Maryland and 12 members in Virginia.

The recreational boating community and the boating businesses surrounding the Chesapeake Bay have a continued interest in the overall Chesapeake Bay ecosystem as well the health of forage fish populations, like the Atlantic Menhaden. Since 2017, the MRAA has been part of a coalition advocating for regulations in the Bay that specifically address menhaden net spills, user conflicts, and the availability of menhaden as prey to important gamefish (e.g., striped bass, bluefish, red drum, cobia). This coalition is comprised of recreational anglers, boaters, business owners, and more, who are part of the Chesapeake Bay outdoor recreation economy that is supported by dwindling gamefish populations. In order realize the full potential of the Chesapeake Bay outdoor recreation economy and fully benefit communities around the Bay, gamefish populations must be rebuilt, ultimately requiring a proper forage fish base.

As a first step towards accomplishing that goal, MRAA supports VMRC's proposal to (1) reduce the likelihood of net spills with a one-mile purse seine buffer along the Virginia's Chesapeake Bay shoreline, (2) reduce user conflicts around the Chesapeake Bridge Tunnel with a half mile purse seine buffer, and (3) implement purse seine holiday closures to minimize the possibility of net spills during peak tourism holidays.

Although net spills in the Chesapeake are rare, they are becoming more common with the increasing amount of forage fish harvest, and this proposal puts in place a much-appreciated, common-sense approach to minimizing them, resulting in real conservation wins. For example, the most recent net spill resulted in approximately over 12,000 pounds of large spawning redfish as dead bycatch, and this proposal may prevent future spills of this magnitude.

We encourage the VMRC to approve the buffers and the holiday closures while simultaneously

focusing on education and outreach to all stakeholders to ensure the success of these measures. Furthermore, we laud the leadership of the VMRC in proposing this action and look forward to collaborating with the VMRC on further proposals that will ultimately address the impacts of high-volume purse seining.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chad Tokowicz', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Chad Tokowicz