



MID-ATLANTIC
FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

PRESS RELEASE

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Council Recommends First-Ever Cap on River Herring and Shad Catch

Last week the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council approved a 236 metric ton (MT) cap on incidental catch of river herring and shad in the U.S. Atlantic mackerel fishery for 2014. Under the new cap, the mackerel fishing fleet—which is primarily composed of trawlers—will risk early closure if they are unable to successfully avoid river herring and shad.

River herring and shad once supported thriving commercial and recreational fisheries, but recent stock assessments indicate that their populations have reached near-historic lows. Although there is little debate about the need for river herring and shad conservation, their decline is likely the result of a combination of several factors, including dams, predation, water quality, climate change, and fishing effort. A variety of analyses have suggested that the Atlantic mackerel fishery can have substantial river herring and shad catch in some years.

The catch cap is one of several protective measures slated to take effect next year as part of Amendment 14 to the Atlantic Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish Fishery Management Plan. The amendment also calls for increased reporting and monitoring requirements for fishermen and dealers. These changes are expected to provide managers with much-needed and improved data about actual river herring and shad catch levels.

During the meeting the Council reviewed input from the fishery's monitoring committee and took comments from the public, which included members of environmental groups and fishing industry participants. After discussing cap levels ranging from 119 to 456 MT, the Council settled on a cap of 236 MT. Council members noted that the lack of detailed information about river herring and shad posed a particular challenge in determining an appropriate cap level.

“It’s important to understand the limitations of the data we are using to manage shad and river herring interactions in our offshore fisheries,” said Council Chairman Rick Robins. “The Council had to develop management advice for a catch cap without the benefit of biological reference points. Given those limitations, the Council recommended a cap that would limit or reduce river herring and shad catch and provide an incentive for the industry to avoid them, consistent with the goals of Amendment 14.”

Although mackerel landings in 2011 and 2012 were relatively low, data suggest that a 236 MT cap would have been a limiting factor for the fishery in two out of six years between 2005 and 2010. “This level should allow fishermen, who are likely in the best position to figure out how to avoid river herring and shad, to catch the mackerel quota if they can achieve a relatively low catch rate of river herrings and shads,” said Jason Didden, fisheries management specialist for the Council.

River herring and shad avoidance will not be a new consideration for many mackerel fishermen. As concerns about river herring and shad populations have escalated in recent years, fishermen have become increasingly involved in voluntary avoidance programs such as the [SMAST Bycatch Avoidance Program](#) and the [Squid Trawl Network Fleet Communication System for Butterfish/River Herring Avoidance](#). These programs will likely play an important role in helping fishermen to minimize river herring and shad catches and avoid early closure of the mackerel fishery under the new cap.

For more information about river herring and shad, contact Jason Didden at jdidden@mafmc.org or (302) 526-5254.