Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 19, 2026

Joe Cimino
Chair
Atlantic Menhaden Management Board
Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC)
1050 N. Highland St., Suite 200 A-N
Arlington, VA 22201

Dear Chair Cimino:

We write to you today to express our support for a strong reduction in the total allowable catch (TAC) for the Atlantic menhaden. Given the decrease in the Atlantic menhaden stock and its critical role in the broader marine ecosystem—including as a vital food source for numerous marine and avian species—a significant reduction in the TAC is necessary to support the health and resilience of the Atlantic Coast.

Menhaden are a keystone species within the Atlantic Coast and Chesapeake Bay marine ecosystems, including in our state of New Jersey. These small forage fish are a crucial component of the diet of osprey as well as predator fish species such as striped bass and bluefish, which are important to our state's marine ecosystems and recreational fishing communities. Maintaining adequate menhaden abundance is essential to protecting these resources for New Jersey residents and future generations.

Excessive menhaden fishing, including harvesting by reduction fisheries, decreases the availability of this forage species for predators throughout the Atlantic ecosystem. The ASMFC's 2025 stock assessment estimated that the average Atlantic menhaden biomass was 37 percent lower than previously estimated. The assessment also showed that a reduction of 50 percent or more in the TAC would be necessary to lower the probability of fishing mortality being at or above the ecological reference point target, which accounts for the forage needs of striped bass. Despite these findings, the Commission adopted a 20 percent reduction in the coastwide TAC for the 2026 fishing season.[1]

[1] Carl Wilson, *Message from DMR Commissioner: ASMFC Menhaden Board Approves 20 Percent Menhaden Quota Reduction*, DEPARTMENT OF MAINE RESOURCES (Oct. 19, 2026, 10:00 AM), https://www.maine.gov/dmr/news/thu-10302025-1200-message-dmr-commissioner-asmfc-menhaden-board-approves-20-percent-menhaden.

This level of reduction is insufficient to address the ecological consequences of declining menhaden abundance. Reduced menhaden availability has been identified as the primary driver of low reproduction in ospreys throughout the Chesapeake Bay.[2] A significant cut to the menhaden TAC is needed to prevent broad ecosystem impacts. We, therefore, urge the Commission to adopt a substantial reduction in the Atlantic menhaden TAC that reflects the best available science and supports the rebuilding of dependent species, and by extension the communities in our state and throughout the Atlantic Coast that rely on them.

We appreciate the Commission's continued work to responsibly manage Atlantic menhaden and urge the Management Board to take strong actions to protect our marine resources. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Frank Pallone, Jr.
Member of Congress

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

cc: ASMFC Atlantic Menhaden Management Board Members

Daniel J. McKiernan, ASMFC Chair

Eugenio Piñeiro Soler, Assistant Administrator for NOAA Fisheries

[2] Bryan D. Watts, ET AL. WIDESPREAD REPRODUCTIVE DEFICITS IN CHESAPEAKE BAY OSPREYS (2026), Frontiers in Marine Science, https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/marine-science/articles/10.3389/fmars.2026.1685158/full#h1.