



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20230

APR 27 2001

The Honorable James V. Hansen
Chairman, Committee on Resources
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-6201

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This letter provides you with the views of the Department of Commerce on H.R. 470, legislation that would prohibit the commercial harvesting of Atlantic striped bass in the coastal waters and the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). We strongly believe that the authority to allocate the striped bass resource should remain with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC).

At the current time, the Atlantic coastal striped bass resource and fisheries are managed in accordance with an Interstate Fisheries Management Plan (ISFMP) prepared by the ASMFC and its member states under the authority of the Atlantic Striped Bass Conservation Act. That ISFMP has been highly successful in rebuilding the Atlantic coastal striped bass resource to its current historically high level of abundance. The resurgence of this resource is attributable largely to conservatively set maximum allowable levels of fishing mortality prescribed by the ISFMP, and controlled and enforced by the ASMFC and its member states. Under the ISFMP, each state is allowed to harvest an annual quota (which is rigidly monitored), and has the further prerogative to then suballocate that quota among its citizens (i.e., commercial versus recreational fishermen) as it chooses. This suballocation by any single state has no effect on the total level of fishing mortality, which is the controlling factor affecting resource abundance.

The Department believes this legislation would only serve to allocate the entire harvestable surplus to a single user group without any additional gain in conservation benefits. Allocation of the harvestable surplus is, appropriately, an individual state's decision and should remain so.

The Office of Management and Budget has advised the Department that there is no objection to the submission of this letter to the Congress from the standpoint of the Administration's program.

Sincerely,

Donald D. Trigg
Director of the Office of Policy
And Strategic Planning

cc: The Honorable Nick Rahall, II
The Honorable Wayne Gilchrest
The Honorable Robert Underwood