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President
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Testimony on H.R. 3906, a bill to amend the Atlantic striped Bass Conservation Act to allow recreational fishing for Atlantic Striped Bass in the Block Island Sound transit zone.

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Chairman Fleming, Ranking Member Sablan, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on Congressman Bishop's legislation.

My name is Captain Paul G. Forsberg, and I am the owner of the Viking Fishing Fleet located in Montauk, New York. The Viking Fleet was founded in Freeport, New York, in 1936 by my father Carl Forsberg. From a young age, I worked as a mate on the boats, and at age twelve my Dad relocated the business and our family to Montauk. From a very early age, I owned my own 24-foot boat where I commercial fished around my school schedule. I also worked for various commercial fishing operations throughout the 1950's.

At age eighteen, I earned my 100-ton Captain's license. I am currently renewing my license for the 12th time. My son and two grandsons are full-time captains with the fleet and along with our staff of excellent full time Captains run most of the trips but I do occasionally get called upon to run a boat at one of our locations.

The Viking Fleet is the largest privately owned and most diversified fishing fleet in the northeast operating from Montauk, New York, Tarpon Springs, Florida, and New Bedford, Massachusetts. As well as our fishing fleet, we also run a ferry operation and are one of the largest year round employers in Montauk. We currently employ around fifty full time employees.

Total salaries, wages and business earnings from the fishing industry in New York exceed \$220 million a year and between 6400 and 10,600 jobs are created annually in New Yorks recreational fishing industry.

Congressman Bishop's legislation, H.R. 3906, to open the Block Island Sound Transit Zone to recreational Striped Bass fishing is of huge importance to our business and to the entire fishing fleet of the east end of Long Island .The benefit to the economy of Long Island cannot be stressed enough. We will be able to employ more people as we would expect to carry many more passengers and sail on more trips. The increase in business would affect all the boats on Long Island and the positive effects would be felt by the tackle shops, marinas, hotels, stores and restaurants. The area known as the EEZ is a known striped bass fishing zone and people on all boats really want an opportunity to fish there.

The striped bass fishery is overly rebuilt with a healthy fish stock and very well managed by the state as far as bag limits and conservation so opening this area will not put any stress or danger of overfishing on this species.

Another factor to consider is the difficulty experienced by the law enforcement officers tasked with policing this area. For example, they may board a vessel fishing in this zone for another species, such as fluke or sea bass, and upon boarding, find striped bass on the boat that were caught in a different area. Proving this is impossible for the boat owner and many innocent law abiding fishermen end up with unjust fines and needless legal bills. This is unfair treatment of an industry at the mercy of senseless fishing regulations and a weakened economy.

The zone we are discussing is a small strip within Block Island Sound between Montauk, New York, Block Island, Rhode Island, and Point Judith, Rhode Island. This can be a very confusing nautical area to navigate by all but the most experienced of captain's, so many innocent fishermen, especially anglers, fishing on private boats are fined due to an innocent mistake. This obviously leaves a bad taste in their mouth and prevents them from coming back to our area. When these private boats don't return to our marinas and to fish in our waters on the east end, neither does the much-needed revenue that they bring.

Congressman Bishop's bill also allows the Secretary to put seasonal or temporary limitations in place to ensure proper management of the species. Clearly, this bill achieves a balance between fishing and conservation and will increase employment.

For these reasons, I do not believe there is any benefit to leaving the zone closed and ask the committee to move Congressman Bishop's legislation forward. Thank you.