

TESTIMONY OF HOWARD KING
BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES, SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES CONSERVATION,
WILDLIFE AND OCEANS

OCEAN CITY, MARYLAND, DECEMBER 11, 2001, 10 A.M.

MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE, I WOULD LIKE TO THANK YOU FOR GIVING THE MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES, FISHERIES SERVICE THE OPPORTUNITY TO ADDRESS THE SUBCOMMITTEE.

MY NAME IS HOWARD KING. I AM THE DIRECTOR FOR MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT FOR THE MARYLAND FISHERIES SERVICE. OUR DEPARTMENT AND UNIT ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR MANAGEMENT OF INTERJURISDICTIONAL AND RESIDENT FISH RESOURCES WITHIN MARYLAND. AS PART OF THIS RESPONSIBILITY WE LICENSE AND REGULATE THE FISHING ACTIVITIES OF COMMERCIAL HARVESTERS AND RECREATIONAL ANGLERS. IT IS INCUMBENT UPON OUR DEPARTMENT TO WORK CLOSELY WITH THE USERS OF THE FISHERY RESOURCES TO IMPLEMENT THE BEST PRACTICAL MANAGEMENT MEASURES. INFORMATION RESULTING FROM COOPERATIVE MANAGEMENT RESEARCH AND SURVEY PROJECTS IS USED IN OUR FISHERIES MANAGEMENT FORUMS OF THE ATLANTIC STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION AND /OR THE MID-ATLANTIC FISHERIES MANAGEMENT COUNCIL. COOPERATIVE INTERACTION WITH THE USERS OF THE RESOURCE IS MOST TYPICALLY THROUGH DIRECT SERVICES CONTRACTED TO LICENSED HARVESTERS AND THROUGH COOPERATIVE CATCH REPORTING FOR COMMERCIAL AND RECREATIONAL USERS.

THE DEPARTMENT CREATED THE WATERMEN'S BAY IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM SPECIFICALLY TO HIRE COMMERCIAL WATERMEN TO CAPTAIN THEIR VESSELS TO PROVIDE AN APPROPRIATE PLATFORM TO SAMPLE FISH AND SHELLFISH RESOURCES. THE SAMPLING IS CONDUCTED AT THE SAME GEAR EFFICIENCIES THAT WOULD BE USED IN THE COMMERCIAL FISHERIES. THIS PRACTICE HAS BEEN APPLIED IN OUR OYSTER, BLUE CRAB, FINFISH, AND TERRAPIN FISHERIES AND COMPLEMENTS OUR FISHERY INDEPENDENT SAMPLING OF THE RESOURCES. WATERMEN HAVE ALSO BEEN USED TO ASSESS THE FEASIBILITY OF REJUVENATING OYSTER BOTTOM THROUGH BAGLESS DREDGING TECHNIQUES. IN OTHER INSTANCES WATERMEN HAVE BEEN HIRED TO MANAGE PILOT AQUACULTURE SHELLFISH PROJECTS IN TIDAL WATERS. IN PAST YEARS WE HAVE ALSO CONTRACTED WITH COMMERCIAL NET OPERATORS TO COLLECT, HOLD AND ASSIST IN TAGGING OR TRANSPLANTING OF CERTAIN SPECIES OF FINFISH. THIS PRACTICE HAS BEEN APPLIED IN OUR YELLOW PERCH AND BLACK DRUM MANAGEMENT. IN EACH CASE THE COOPERATIVE EFFORTS HAVE RESULTED IN BETTER INFORMATION AND SOUND GUIDANCE IN DETERMINING PREFERRED MANAGEMENT OPTIONS.

WE HAVE CONTRACTED WITH WATERMEN THROUGH THE MARYLAND WATERMEN'S ASSOCIATION TO CHART THE MOST FREQUENTED COMMERCIAL FINFISHING AREAS OF THE MARYLAND PORTION OF THE CHESAPEAKE BAY. PROVIDED ALSO WERE INFORMATION ON BOTTOM HANGS, GEAR USE FREQUENCIES AND THE GENERAL SIZE AND GRADE OF FISH CAUGHT DURING THE VARIOUS SEASONS.

CHARTER BOAT CAPTAINS AND VESSELS HAVE BEEN HIRED TO FISH UNDER CONTROLLED CONDITIONS TO ASSESS CATCH AND BYCATCH RELEASE MORTALITY IN AREAS SUBJECT TO POTENTIALLY EXCESSIVE BYCATCH MORTALITY. RECREATIONAL ANGLERS ALSO ASSISTED IN THE PROJECT. THIS ASSISTANCE RESULTED IN CLOSED AREAS BEING OPENED TO A STRIPED BASS CATCH AND RELEASE FISHERY IN A PREVIOUSLY CLOSED AREA. CHARTER BOAT CAPTAINS, VESSELS, AND RECREATIONAL ANGLERS HAVE ALSO DIRECTLY ASSISTED IN THE ESTIMATION OF ANGLER CATCH SUCCESS RATES ON AND AROUND ESTABLISHED ARTIFICIAL REEFS IN CHESAPEAKE BAY.

THE COMMERCIAL CATCH OF ANY SPECIES SUBJECT TO A FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN OR REGULATIONS IS REQUIRED TO BE REPORTED. RECENTLY THE DEPARTMENT INITIATED A DETAILED TRIP TICKET CATCH REPORTING SYSTEM IN OUR OCEANSIDE BAYS WITH THE COOPERATION OF THE HARVESTERS. THE DEPARTMENT IS WORKING WITH THE ATLANTIC STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION AND COOPERATING SEAFOOD DEALERS TO DEVELOP A PROTOTYPE ELECTRONIC CATCH REPORTING SYSTEM FOR OUR COMMERCIAL STRIPED BASS FISHERY. THIS EFFORT REQUIRES THE COOPERATION OF EACH SEGMENT IN THE TRANSACTION CHAIN FOR THE PURPOSE OF COLLECTING BETTER CATCH DATA IN THE MOST TIMELY MANNER. TIMELINESS IS ESSENTIAL IN THE MANAGEMENT OF A QUOTA-BASED FISHERY WITH MONTHLY ALLOCATIONS.

RECREATIONAL ANGLERS ARE COOPERATING WITH THE DEPARTMENT TO PROVIDE CATCH AND EFFORT INFORMATION FOR THE OCEANSIDE SUMMER FLOUNDER FISHERY. WE ALSO ESTABLISHED AN ANGLER SURVEY FOR OUR CHESAPEAKE BAY STRIPED BASS FISHERY. THESE VOLUNTEER EFFORTS CONTRIBUTE DATA FOR MANY FISHERY PARAMETERS AND IS THE ONLY DATABASE AVAILABLE TO THE DEPARTMENT THAT PROVIDES LENGTH FREQUENCY DATA FOR THE RECREATIONAL STRIPED BASS FISHERY. THE VOLUNTEER ANGLER STRIPED BASS SURVEY IS AN ONLINE WEB-BASED REPORTING SYSTEM.

THE MAGNUSON-STEVENSON FISHERY CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT ACT, WHEN REAUTHORIZED, SHOULD BE CERTAIN TO PREVENT OVERFISHING AND YIELD SUSTAINABLE LONG-TERM BENEFITS FROM OUR FISHERY RESOURCES. REGULATORS AND USERS ARE STILL ADJUSTING TO THE CURRENT AUTHORIZATION. THE REAUTHORIZATION SHOULD PROVIDE STABILITY AS WE WORK THROUGH THE RECOVERY PLANS. THE ACT SHOULD ALSO PROVIDE THE FRAMEWORK FOR ADVANCEMENTS IN ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT BUT SHOULD NOT BE SO SPECIFIC THAT IT DETERS ADAPTIVE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROCESSES. WE SHOULD STRIVE TO REDUCE OR ELIMINATE AMBIGUITY, STRENGTHEN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN REGULATORS AND USERS IN THE COMMERCIAL INDUSTRIES AND THE RECREATIONAL COMMUNITY, AND ESTABLISH BETTER LINKAGES AND PROTECTIVE MEASURES FOR ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT AND CONSERVATION. IT WOULD BE BENEFICIAL IF FUNDS COULD BE AUTHORIZED FOR STATES TO SHARE IN RESEARCH SET-ASIDES TO DEVELOP BETTER BYCATCH REDUCTION GEAR FOR SPECIES CAPTURED WITHIN STATE JURISDICTIONAL WATERS AND INLAND MARINE AND ESTUARINE WATERS.

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