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Comments on the Reauthorization of PL 89-304

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MADE TO THE HOUSE SUB-COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES

AND WILDLIFE, CONSERVATION AND THE ENVIRONMENT

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J. B. BREAUX, CHAIRMAN

22 MARCH 1982

Mr. Chairman, members of the Sub-Committee:

I am an Assistant Director and Head of the Division of Fisheries Science and Services at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science. I have conducted research on striped bass and served on the Scientific and Statistical Committee for the Striped Bass Management Plan Mr. Alperin referred to. Much data in that plan and the future shad and river herring plan were generated by money from 89-304.

We support reauthorization of PL 89-304. The anadromous fish species resident in the Chesapeake Bay tributaries of Virginia have been an important resource since before the first English settlers. Shad, river herrings and striped bass have been important food fishes since colonial times. Additionally, the young river herring are a major source of food for other important species. The very fact that they choose to spawn and live in the estuarine rivers of the eastern seaboard makes them vulnerable to both large interannual fluctuations in natural environmental conditions (Hurricane Agnes) and pressure from man's activities (dams,

pollution). The combination of periodic or cyclic natural environmental events, fishing pressure, and pollutants have driven all anadromous species to record low levels of abundance.

Cooperative research and monitoring programs on the biology and fisheries of shad and river herring at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science and State of North Carolina helped to document the decline of the adult stocks due in part to foreign fishing pressure during the late 1960's - early 1970's; (Virginia river herring landings from 30 X 10^6 to 0.5 to 10^6 pounds, shad from 4 X 10^6 to 0.5 million pounds) and have kept an annual check on the pulse of the spawning, recruitment and mortality ever since with the goal of discerning the cause of the decline and possible remedial actions.

The decline in the striped bass stocks during the late 1970's (Virginia commercial landings from over 2.5 million to less than 0.5 million pounds) generated considerable concern; and funding through the Chaffee Amendment which has supported studies directed toward explaining the causes for this decline. Virginia and Maryland scientists, who are cooperatively studying the fish on the spawning and nursery grounds are looking into interannual fluctuations in climate, predator and prey species, larval starvation, and changes in the distribution of juveniles as possible explanatory mechanisms.

Continued research and monitoring of the shad and river herring stocks and fishery are important as they are at such low levels that the Virginia Marine Resources Commission must be in a position to make rapid, informed management decisions, in concert with the State of Maryland. The level of needed effort

can only be continued with a combination of State and Federal funding.

The research conducted here and on the west coast on the striped bass for the last two years with State, Federal research, and Chaffee Amendment funds is only now beginning to yield information that provides direction for our future research, and supports the recent State-Federal Fisheries Management Plan for striped bass. The continuation of these efforts is dependent upon at least level funding. Reduction or elimination of the funds or programs would reduce the effectiveness of the interstate management programs, only now beginning to go into effect. Further, the final conclusion as to the causes for the decline of the striped bass would not be forthcoming.

Mr. Chairman, most striped bass spawn in the Chesapeake Bay tributaries, but for 9 months of the year, April - December they migrate coastally where they constitute 90% of the commercial and recreational catch in Delaware, New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Maine. Research on striped bass spawning and recruitment in the Chesapeake Bay and tributaries conducted by Virginia and Maryland benefits the above states and it is appropriate that these efforts receive continued matching Federal support.