



# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

### FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE

For Release February 10, 1987

FWS--Megan Durham 202-343-5634  
NMFS--Brian Gorman 202-673-5445

### STRIPED BASS CONSERVATION MEASURES NEEDED IN NEW JERSEY, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA TO AVOID FEDERAL FISHING BAN

The Departments of the Interior and Commerce will publish joint notices in the February 12 Federal Register announcing that they intend to impose a moratorium on striped bass fishing in the waters of the District of Columbia and coastal waters of New Jersey because the District and New Jersey are not in compliance with the Atlantic Striped Bass Conservation Act.

Letters announcing the decision have been sent to New Jersey Governor Thomas H. Kean and District Mayor Marion Barry, signed by William Horn, Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, and Anthony J. Calio, Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere. If New Jersey and the District do not adopt regulations to protect female striped bass from the Chesapeake Bay, Interior and Commerce will impose the striped bass fishing moratorium effective April 1, the agencies said. The letter to Mayor Barry commended the District's progress in developing regulations and said that, based on available information, it appears that the regulations being developed would, if adopted, bring the District into compliance and eliminate the need for a fishing moratorium. The letter to Governor Kean encouraged New Jersey to take the resource conservation measures necessary to meet the requirements of the Atlantic Striped Bass Conservation Act.

The Act applies to coastal migratory stocks of striped bass occurring from Maine to North Carolina. It requires that these coastal States (including Pennsylvania, the District of Columbia, and the Potomac River Fisheries Commission) adopt and enforce regulations to implement the Interstate Management Plan for Striped Bass, developed by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission.

The objective is to prevent fishing mortality on at least 95 percent of the Chesapeake Bay stock females hatched in 1982 and subsequent years, until they have had the opportunity to reproduce at least once. States may achieve this objective through such measures as size limits, full or seasonal closures of their striped bass fishery, and prohibition of "allowable by-catch" (incidental catching of striped bass while fishing for other species).

(over)

Under the Act, the Commission reviews whether States have adopted the regulatory measures necessary to implement the management plan, and notifies the Secretaries of Commerce and the Interior if a State is not in compliance. Interior and Commerce must then determine whether they agree the State is not in compliance. If so, the Federal agencies are required to impose a moratorium.

On December 31, 1986, the Commission sent a letter to the Secretaries of the Interior and Commerce reporting that the District and New Jersey were not in compliance with the striped bass fisheries management plan. Officials of Interior and Commerce subsequently met with representatives from New Jersey and the District to discuss their efforts to comply with the plan.

The District of Columbia has been subject to the provisions of the Act only since October 1986, and previously did not have a fully established fisheries program nor any regulations restricting recreational striped bass fishing.

The District is now developing measures to come into compliance with the plan. Because the District has made considerable progress in a short period of time, the Federal agencies have delayed imposition of a fishing moratorium until April 1 in order to give the District an opportunity to complete its regulatory process.

In New Jersey, regulations regarding coastal striped bass fishing are established by the State legislature, where two such bills are currently pending. The Departments of the Interior and Commerce have not consulted officially with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission to determine whether these bills would satisfy the requirements of the striped bass management plan. In their letter to Governor Kean, however, Horn and Calio said that, in their opinion, the bills, if enacted, would not result in compliance. The Commission notified New Jersey in October 1986 that in order to be in compliance with the plan, New Jersey needs to impose a minimum size restriction of 31 inches by February 1987 and 33 inches by August 1987. The Departments of the Interior and Commerce have given New Jersey until April 1 to enact legislation to comply with the plan.

The Chesapeake Bay historically was the major spawning and nursery ground for striped bass that migrate along the Atlantic coast and support commercial and recreational fisheries from North Carolina to Maine. Striped bass stocks in the Bay and elsewhere along the Atlantic coast have been declining for more than a decade. Sport and commercial catches of striped bass along the Atlantic coast have declined by 90 percent since 1973. State and Federal fishery agencies are presently engaged in a major conservation and restoration effort on behalf of the striped bass, conducting research on causes of the decline, stocking young striped bass, and imposing fishing restrictions to reduce the striped bass catch and protect spawning females.