

Van Drew, Smith Measure Asks President to Reject Summer Flounder Catch Reduction

TRENTON – A measure sponsored by Senators Jeff Van Drew and Bob Smith urging President Donald Trump to reject the reduction in the summer flounder catch limit – an action that will have a drastic impact on fishing in New Jersey and the economy – and urging the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to conduct a new summer flounder assessment was approved today by the Senate.

“We are very concerned about the decision to move forward with a catch reduction. That fact that it was based on faulty data only adds insult to injury,” said Senator Van Drew (D-Cape May, Cumberland, Atlantic.) “We are urging the President to reject this dramatic change that will have a real negative effect on both the fishing industry and our economy and asking for a new assessment before any new catch quota is implemented.”

“There is no doubt that fishermen in the state are going to be severely impacted by this policy change. We are asking the federal government to halt the process so that an accurate assessment of the summer flounder stock can be determined,” said Senator Smith (D-Middlesex). “That is the responsible way to handle this matter, given the severe economic hardship that will be caused by such a dramatic catch reduction.”

On February 2, 2017 the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission voted to reduce summer flounder catch limits by implementing reductions between 28 percent and 32 percent along the New Jersey coast. The decision was based on the 2016 Stock Assessment Update report published by NOAA. The findings in the report were based largely on data obtained through random sampling off other coastal states. As a result, the assessments made are merely estimates which may not represent the actual status of the summer flounder stock.

The bill’s sponsors and members of the New Jersey Congressional Delegation, warn that the significant reduction in catch limits could destroy the recreational and commercial summer flounder industries in the State, and cause tremendous harm to the economy of the New Jersey shore.

Many communities along the New Jersey shore that rely heavily on fishing are already struggling, in part, due to reduced summer flounder quotas from prior years. According to the Jersey Coast Anglers Association, from 2007 to 2014, New Jersey lost two million fishing trips, 40 percent of which were in pursuit of summer flounder.

The resolution (a Senate Committee Substitute for SR-102 and SR-103) urges President Donald Trump to reject the 40 percent reduction in summer flounder catch limits by repealing, rescinding, or otherwise prohibiting implementation of the rule adopted by the National Marine Fisheries Service on December 22, 2016. This resolution also urges the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to immediately conduct a new summer flounder assessment and refrain from enforcing a reduction in summer flounder catch limits until a new benchmark assessment has been conducted.

The Senate approved the resolution. Copies will now be transmitted to the President of the United States, the Chair of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, the Chairman of the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, the Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, the Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, the Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere, and every member of Congress elected from the State of New Jersey.