

-  Share
-  Tweet
-  Forward
-  Share
-  +1



The "Right to Fish" Law: Protecting Virginia's Watermen

Menhaden Fisheries Coalition and Virginia Waterman's Association Thank Governor Youngkin for Declaring "Commercial Waterman Safety Week" in Response to Growing Threats

declared this week, September 15-21, 2024, “Commercial Waterman Safety Week.” The [governor’s proclamation](#) recognizes that Virginia’s more than 1,500 commercial watermen “risk their lives sustaining a tradition passed down through generations,” help generate over \$1 billion in economic impact for the Commonwealth, and deserve “access to a secure and safe work environment.”

The Menhaden Fisheries Coalition and the Virginia Waterman’s Association are grateful to Governor Youngkin for recognizing the vital role of Virginia watermen, including menhaden fishermen and watermen harvesting crabs, oysters, clams, fish, and other shellfish. Governor Youngkin has taken important steps to ensure Virginia’s fishermen and watermen have a safe place to work on the water.

Earlier this year, increasing threats and acts of harassment directed towards commercial fishermen operating in Virginia waters led the governor to [sign the “Right to Fish” law](#), which raises penalties for those who interfere with or impede commercial watermen. This legislation was overwhelmingly approved by the General Assembly, passing the Virginia House 99-0 and the Virginia Senate 38-1.

"We put something on the books that said we are going to protect and defend the industry and its people," said Delegate Hillary Pugh Kent, the legislation’s primary sponsor, in a Menhaden Fisheries Coalition [video](#). "It's a worker safety bill."

The most notable incident that led to the “Right to Fish” law occurred nearly a year ago. On September 23, 2023, menhaden fishermen working for Ocean Harvesters were accosted by an individual on a jet ski, who harassed the crew as they operated a pair of menhaden purse vessels. The individual drove his jet ski inside the purse seine net connecting the two vessels, yelling profanities and threats at the Ocean Harvesters workers, before speeding out of the net right before it closed. This was the third such incident of targeted harassment on the water during the late summer months of 2023. It also came amid increasing threats to commercial menhaden fishermen on social media.

The Atlantic menhaden fishery has operated continuously in Virginia for over 100 years. It has repeatedly been found to be a sustainable fishery. The [most recent stock assessment](#) from the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

found that menhaden are not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. An [analysis by the Science Center for Maine Fisheries](#) found that 99.5 percent of menhaden born each year are left in the water to fulfill their ecological role. The fishery has been [certified sustainable](#) by the Marine Stewardship Council, the

Virginia watermen are a diverse group of hardworking individuals who make their living from the waters of the Chesapeake Bay, its tributaries, and the coastal areas of Virginia. These watermen are deeply connected to the traditions and culture of commercial fishing, often coming from families that have worked the waters for generations. They harvest a wide range of seafood, including crabs, oysters, clams, and fish, employing time-honored methods alongside modern practices. The watermen are dedicated stewards of the environment, relying on the health of the waterways for their livelihoods, and they work in challenging and often dangerous conditions.

About the Virginia Waterman's Association

The [Virginia Waterman's Association](#) represents commercial fishermen in Virginia who work in the state's various waterways, including the Chesapeake Bay, its rivers, and coastal waters. These fishermen typically engage in harvesting a variety of seafood, such as crabs, oysters, clams, fish, and other shellfish. The association advocates for the rights, interests, and sustainability of these watermen, particularly focusing on issues like fisheries management, environmental conservation, and regulations that affect the livelihoods of commercial fishermen in the region.

About the Menhaden Fisheries Coalition

The [Menhaden Fisheries Coalition](#) (MFC) is a collective of menhaden fishermen, related businesses, and supporting industries. Comprised of businesses along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, the Menhaden Fisheries Coalition conducts media and public outreach on behalf of the menhaden industry to ensure that members of the public, media, and government are informed of important issues, events, and facts about the fishery.



Copyright © 2024 Stove Boat LLC, All rights reserved.

Menhaden Fisheries Coalition | menhadencoalition.org

Our mailing address is:

1518 K Street NW
Suite 301
Washington, D.C. 20005

Want to change how you receive these emails?

You can update your preferences or unsubscribe from this list

