

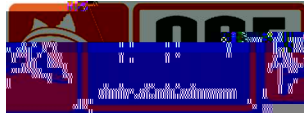
is concentrated in Louisiana and Mississippi waters.³ Additionally, 20% of the total catch was found to take place between 0-1 miles from shore. This study is the only one of its kind and would qualify as the best available science. While this study is dated and fishing operations naturally change over time, there is no public data to suggest that these numbers are dissimilar from catch today. This fishery harvests over 1 billion pounds of menhaden annually in one of the most critical nursery habitats in the Gulf of Mexico.⁴ Gulf shoreline, particularly those in Louisiana, are plagued by deterioration from myriad of factors. With vital coastal habitat dwindling for iconic predators like red drum and spotted seatrout, consideration of the spatial component of fishery operations is paramount. Fishing effort is not the only lever that can be pulled to rebuild fish stocks effectively and sustainably.

Regulators considering the passage of this NOI into final rule must be confident that its effects will provide measurable contributions towards both ecosystem health and economic opportunities alike. This NOI should reduce purse seine interactions with red drum, spotted seatrout, and other coastal predators that utilize nearshore areas heavily during spawning seasons and will improve their recovery in the long run. This could, in turn, enhance opportunities for recreational fishing and coastal tourism throughout Spots and Paradise. The recreational fishing industry supports nearly 18,000 jobs and provides \$2.5 billion in economic output each year to Louisiana.⁵ In the state's coastal US Congressional districts alone (), a combined \$1.29 billion in annual economic output and 9,150 jobs are derived from recreational fishing. The effects of the proposed regulations could add more than \$64 million in economic output to these coastal districts if recreational fishing activity increased by an average 5%. While it is not possible to forecast these compounding benefits with certainty, at a minimum, the amendments within the NOI will reduce user conflicts on the water in high traffic areas. These amendments will additionally benefit coastal communities and beachgoers as fewer dead fish will foul public beaches and reduce access, and the accelerated cleanup timeline will lower the potential for bacteria-related issues to arise. Louisiana's coastal communities rely on healthy coastal habitats and sustainable economic opportunities that promote their unique and iconic culture. The NOI to amend rules to the menhaden fishery will allow for this future to continue for generations to come.

We commend the Commission for taking action to protect Louisiana's coastal habitat and marine resources, and we urge the Commission to finalize the proposed amendments to rules in the menhaden fishery within the NOI. We further encourage the Commission to continue to work with all stakeholders, including the recreational fishing, boating, and wildlife conservation communities to develop ecologically based management for menhaden that considers the needs of sportfish, birds, and marine mammals.

Sincerely,

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Executive Director



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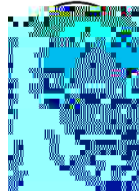
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