

**TESTIMONY OF
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

**BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES CONSERVATION, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS
COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES
U. S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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Good morning, Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee. My name is John H. Dunnigan. I am the Director of the Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. You have asked for our views on H.R. 3883, a bill to reauthorize the Atlantic Striped Bass Conservation Act (ASBCA).

We believe that the ASBCA has provided an effective partnership between the States and Federal agencies in the management of this important resource. Continued commitment to this partnership has been the single-most important factor responsible for the recovery of the coastal migratory stocks of striped bass. The Atlantic Striped Bass Fishery Management Plan (FMP) of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC), implemented under the authority of the ASBCA, was successful in reducing coastwide fishing mortality to a level which allowed the striped bass stocks to recover. This success would not have been possible without the provisions included in the ASBCA that required participating states to adopt all regulatory measures necessary to fully implement the FMP in their coastal waters.

By enacting the ASBCA, Congress recognized that effective management of interjurisdictional fisheries, such as the fishery for striped bass, requires the cooperative efforts of all interested states, Federal agencies, and user groups. The recovery of Atlantic coastal striped bass stocks clearly demonstrates that fishery management works, especially when a unified, cooperative approach is taken.

In total, the recovery of Atlantic striped bass populations represents a true resource management success story. From an extremely overfished state in the mid-1980s, coastal stocks have recovered to high levels of abundance and fishing mortality rates have remained within sustainable limits, due to the coordinated actions of all management partners. This success has provided increased fishing opportunities in coastal states from Maine through North Carolina. In 2002, recreational fishermen were able to land an estimated 1.8 million fish totaling nearly 19 million pounds. An additional 14 million striped bass were estimated to have been caught and released by anglers in that year. Commercial landings totaled 654,000 fish weighing nearly 6 million pounds, in 2002, within the limits allowed under the FMP.

Adoption in 2003 of Amendment 6 to the Interstate FMP represents another milestone in this effort, allowing the transition from management of a recovering stock to implementation of measures that provide for a productive resource and a sustainable fishery. NOAA Fisheries is committed to continue to work with our State management partners in the cooperative management of this and all our shared fishery resources.

Each of the states that have striped bass fisheries maintains monitoring programs necessary for collection of data from those fisheries. Many of the states, as well as NOAA Fisheries and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, conduct fishery-independent research programs that provide the biological samples, population data, and analyses needed for striped bass stock assessments. Continuation of adequate monitoring and research programs by all management partners is necessary to assure the continued success of striped bass management.

The Administration does not propose any substantive changes to the ASBCA at this time, but we are prepared to discuss, with the ASMFC and the States, any changes which they believe may be warranted. We believe that funds authorized are adequate to address these needs.

This concludes my testimony, Mr. Chairman. I will be happy to respond to any questions that you or members of your Subcommittee may have.