



Ensuring the health and conservation of our marine resources and anglers' access to them.

Coastal Conservation Association Northern Virginia
2356 Tumbletree Way
Reston, VA 20191
joincca.org/cca-virginia

November 22, 2021

Mr. Steven G. Bowman
Commissioner, Marine Resources Commission
380 Fenwick Road
Fort Monroe, VA 23651
CC: Associate Commissioners, MRC

Dear Commissioner Bowman,

CCA Virginia is writing to urge the Virginia Marine Resources Commission to take immediate and corrective action to close the loophole in the commercial speckled trout fishery that inadvertently allows haul seines to be used as "stop nets," a technique in which unknown numbers of large speckled trout are kept alive in the net's pocket to be harvested multiple times over several days.

This past summer, changes to the speckled trout fishery regulations were implemented to address a supposed "bycatch" problem. Unfortunately, the unintended consequence has been a targeted harvest, which puts Virginia's speckled trout fishery unnecessarily at risk.

As currently written, Virginia's code pertaining to haul seines is rather vague. Respectfully, we urge the VMRC to adopt regulations that specifically prohibit the use of haul seines as stationary gear for the purpose of penning fish and stopping their natural migration. Additionally, the revised regulations should make it unlawful for any person to encircle and hold fish in a haul seine, including the pocket, for more than six hours.

Many of the speckled trout ensnared using the "stop net" technique are large, breeding sized females. Historically, the speckled trout fishery in the Commonwealth has been largely a recreational fishery. By supporting a reduction in creel and stricter size limits, Virginia anglers have made our desires crystal clear: Manage speckled trout for maximum abundance, not for maximum harvest. Moreover, until we have a stock assessment to better understand the current status of the speckled trout stock, VMRC should be extra cautious in its management of this popular gamefish.

Speckled trout are far too valuable to be caught and penned as bycatch. By taking proactive measures now to close the "stop net" loophole and clarify haul seine regulations, we can eliminate this troubling trend and avoid the possible spread of the practice to other fisheries in the future. Thank you, your staff, and Associate Commissioners for your commitment to conserving the Chesapeake's marine resources and supporting sustainable fisheries.

Respectfully,

Rob Allen

President, CCA Northern Virginia Chapter