



April 26, 2022

VIA EMAIL

Mike Luisi, Chair
Mid-Atlantic Regional Fishery Management Council
800 North State Street, Suite 201
Dover, DE 19901

Dear Mike,

Unfortunately, due to scheduling conflicts I will only be able to join the April 27 Research Steering Committee meeting during the morning session, and other conflicts prevent me from having a representative at the meeting during the afternoon to discuss the potential redevelopment of the Mid-Atlantic Research Set-Aside (RSA) Program. However, given the importance of the discussion, I offer the following input for consideration.

There were questions presented to my staff regarding the ability of a state to opt out of participating in the RSA program; meaning vessels would not be allowed to land RSA compensation fishing trips in those states. In consultation with General Counsel, while it may be possible to design an RSA program with this provision, it would be important to more fully understand the reason some states have expressed this interest, and to understand potential impacts on RSA operations and funding potential.

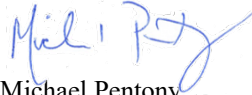
I also want to provide some feedback on the RSA program goals that were developed by the Committee and RSA workshop participants:

- Mid-Atlantic RSA Program goal #1 -- We strongly agree that supporting research is the primary purpose and goal of RSA programs.
- Mid-Atlantic RSA Program goal #2 -- Because the program was suspended primarily due to abuses of compensation fishing privileges, reducing state and federal administrative and enforcement burden will help ensure similar abuses would not occur if the program is reestablished. Federal resources have been re-allocated since the Mid-Atlantic RSA program was suspended. Additional federal resources will not be available to administer the program should the Council choose to re-establish this program, so it's important that the program minimize administrative burden as much as possible. We encourage the Committee to describe in more detail the nature of such burden and how recommendations would reduce administrative and enforcement burden. Greater description of how recommendations would reduce the potential for abusing fishing privileges would also be helpful.
- Mid-Atlantic RSA Program goal #3 -- A Mid-Atlantic RSA program is not viable without reliable funding for research. Reducing or eliminating compensation fishing activity that does not generate substantive funding will reduce administrative and enforcement burden. A more detailed analysis of compensation fishing activity under the prior program would help illuminate ways to reduce unnecessary RSA harvest activity while accomplishing the need to generate funds through compensation fishing.
- Mid-Atlantic RSA Program goal #4 -- We agree that strong collaboration and partnerships between RSA grant recipients and the fishing industry is a strength of RSA programs, and that close coordination between grant recipients, NOAA Fisheries, states, and the Council would be essential in re-establishing and maintaining a Mid-Atlantic RSA program.



We are thankful for the effort that the Committee and workshop participants have given in considering the re-development of this program. With additional deliberation, we agree that a thoughtfully crafted plan could re-establish this as an effective research program that avoids prior shortcomings. Please contact Ryan Silva for any questions regarding this letter.

Sincerely,



Michael Pentony
Regional Administrator