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Mid-Atlantic Council Recommends Measures to Protect River Herring and Shad *Council Approves Amendment 14 and Initiates Amendment 15*

At last week's meeting in New York City, the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council recommended measures to improve catch monitoring and reduce bycatch of river herrings (blueback and alewife) and shads (American and hickory) in the Atlantic mackerel and longfin squid fisheries. These recommendations, if approved by The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), will be implemented via Amendment 14 to the Atlantic Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish Fishery Management Plan.

River herrings and shads are among a number of important forage species in the Northeast region. Although they are not managed as directed fisheries, river herrings and shads are caught as incidental catch (bycatch) by trawlers fishing for mackerel and squid.

Concerns about bycatch of these species have escalated in recent months after an Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) stock assessment indicated that 92% of the 24 assessed river herring stocks were depleted. The Council initiated Amendment 14 in response to a request from the ASMFC to improve monitoring and reduce river herring interactions as part of a coordinated effort to address sources of river herring mortality.

The recommended measures for Amendment 14 include a catch cap for river herrings and shads in the mackerel fishery beginning in 2014 and increased vessel and dealer reporting requirements. The Council recommended that NMFS increase observer coverage in the mackerel fishery and require 100% coverage on mid-water trawlers. A portion of the costs associated with these new requirements would be paid by fishery participants. More rigorous reporting and monitoring requirements are expected to result in more accurate and complete data on river herring and shad catches.

The Council discussed the feasibility of adding river herrings and/or shads as directly managed fisheries in Amendment 14, and they determined that a follow-up Amendment (15) would allow for a more complete consideration of the issue. Amendment 15 could include provisions for setting Annual Catch Limits, identifying Essential Fish Habitat, and establishing joint management with management partners such as the New England Fishery Management Council and/or the ASMFC.

“The Council recommended a strong monitoring program that will substantially improve our understanding of river herring and shad interactions in these small-mesh trawl fisheries,” said Council Chairman Rick Robins. “A catch cap will enable the Council to directly limit river herring and shad bycatch in these fisheries, and it will encourage the fleet to utilize bycatch avoidance programs to target mackerel and longfin squid in areas with lower rates of river herring and shad interactions.”