

DRAFT

Proposed Position Statement for Fisheries GIT

Shad & River Herring Ocean Bycatch

July 13, 2016

**Background:** Shad and river herring stocks along the Atlantic coast are arguably at their lowest level on record. River herring were even recently considered for listing. Historically, these stocks provided the most vibrant and culturally important fisheries in the Chesapeake watershed for centuries. Directed catch of American shad has been prohibited in the region for decades and is now not allowed for any *Alosid* species. In addition, state and federal agencies and utilities have invested many millions of dollars in fish passage, dam removal and hatchery stocking to help rebuild these stocks. Furthermore, it has been ten years since the mixed stock fishery for shad in the ocean was phased out by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission in support of the states actions to rebuild the traditional and more readily manageable river-specific fisheries. In spite of all these investments, shad and river herring are showing little signs of recovery in Chesapeake tributaries.

In view of concerns that bycatch in ocean fisheries for mackerel and herring was a significant factor for shad and river herring stocks, in 2013 the Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council considered whether to add them as federally managed stocks in the Atlantic mackerel fishery. The Council elected not to take this step, which would have conveyed full conservation and management coverage to these stocks, but committed to revisiting the issue in three years. That deliberation will take place in October. Since 2013 the Council has attempted to address bycatch concerns with catch caps and slippage prohibitions, but these measures have been unenforceable without meaningful compliance monitoring. Efforts to achieve full observer coverage have failed. Adding the *Alosid* species as stocks in the mackerel fishery would convey better catch accountability and annual catch limits to these stocks and may be the only remaining option for effective resolution of the bycatch problem.

**Position Statement:** The bycatch of shad and river herring in federally-managed fisheries in the EEZ undermines efforts of the states and federal agencies to protect and rebuild these stocks and restore the traditional in-river fisheries for these species. The Fisheries Goal Implementation Team of the Chesapeake Bay Program urges the Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council to add shad and river herring as stocks in the fishery for Atlantic mackerel and provide full accountability and biologically-based catch limits for these severely depleted stocks.