FISHERIES ADVISORY COUNCIL - A group of dedicated citizens from all regions of the state working together for fish and fishing in Connecticut.

TO: Sen. Beth Bye, Co-Chair, Appropriations Sub-Committee
Rep. Ezequiel Santiago, Co-Chair Appropriations Sub-Committee
Members of the Appropriations Sub-Committee for Conservation and Development

FROM: Gregory A. Sharp, Chairman
Fisheries Advisory Council

DATE: March 2, 2015

RE: Testimony in Opposition to the Proposed Elimination of Funding for the Kensington Hatchery

Senator Bye, Representative Santiago and members of the Appropriations Subcommittee For Conservation and Development, my name is Greg Sharp, and I am Chairman of the Fisheries Advisory Council.

The FAC is a volunteer organization that advises the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection on marine and freshwater fisheries issues, provides input on regulations, and monitors budgetary developments to ensure that the agency has sufficient funding support to carry out its mission.

Our members include a broad cross-section of groups and individuals including representatives of fishing organizations, such as Trout Unlimited, Housatonic Flyfishermen's Association, Connecticut Fly Fisherman's Association, Conn/RI Coastal Flyfishers, Recreational Fishing Alliance of CT, CT River Salmon Association, Bass Nation, local sportsmen's clubs, UConn faculty, fishing shop owners, media representatives, and others interested in fisheries issues.

For a number of good and sufficient reasons, FAC strongly opposes the proposal of the Office of Policy and Management ("OPM") to close the Kensington Hatchery in order to save $195,000 in DEEP's other expenses budget.

As many of you will recall from the last budget cycle, this is not a new proposal. OPM has put the hatchery's funding on the chopping block in the last several proposed budgets, but each time, the legislature, after becoming aware of the value of the hatchery and the programs it supports, restored the funding.

Kensington is the State's smallest hatchery, but it is unique in that it supports both the last Connecticut River genetic strain of Atlantic Salmon, and a unique strain of large Seeforellen Brown Trout. It is also the source of juvenile trout and salmon for two very popular school programs: Trout Unlimited's "Trout in the Classroom" and the Connecticut River Salmon Association's "Salmon-in-Schools." The hatchery also raises 8% of the Cortland strain of Brown Trout, the most common genetic strain of brown trout stocked in state waters.

The state's other two hatcheries -- Quinebaug and Burlington -- are at full capacity and cannot take on the continued propagation of the legacy strain of Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon, the Seeforellens, or the production of trout and salmon eggs that could be used in the school programs.

The legacy strain of Connecticut River Salmon is the result of a more than 40 year breeding and recapture program, and that gene pool will disappear if Kensington is closed. Moreover, the post-spawn broodstock are released to the Naugatuck and Shetucket Rivers and provide up to 7,000 Atlantic Salmon fishing trips for anglers each year.

The two school programs reach approximately 15,000 students per year in 170 schools throughout the state, according to figures provided by the Department. They provide students with a unique educational opportunity and a first-hand look at the growth and development of these two species from eyed eggs to juvenile fish during the January to June program cycle. These school programs, carried out with the help of volunteers, are a cost-effective way of raising environmental awareness in Connecticut's youth.

The loss of 8% of DEEP's Cortland strain of brown trout production, the loss of all of the Seeforellen trout production, and the loss of the Atlantic Salmon brood stock will significantly reduce angler opportunities. This in turn will reduce angler hours, which will adversely impact tourism and small business revenues (tackle shops, restaurants, etc.), as well as the taxes paid on those revenues.

It is worth noting here that, according to DEEP estimates, the 700,000 trout stocked annually in the state generate approximately 2.1 million fishing trips each year, and those trips drive a $50 million revenue stream to the state's economy. In addition, the Connecticut Center for Economic Analysis at UConn projects that for every $1 spent on natural resources, $38 in economic activity is generated. In short, viewed correctly, Kensington is a profit center for the State, which generates more revenue than the operating expenses OPM is proposing to save by closing the hatchery.

Anglers are understandably frustrated and upset with a system which requires them to pay license fees for the privilege of fishing and to pay excise taxes on the fishing equipment they buy -- which combined generates $7.3 million in revenue to State coffers -- only to see the programs they fund be cut in tough budget years. In 2014, DEEP issued approximately 165,000 licenses allowing residents and non-residents to fish in inland waters of the State. It is reasonable to assume that the vast majority of all of these license holders acquired these licenses to have the opportunity to fish for trout

or salmon.

For these reasons, the FAC would ask the Appropriations Committee to restore the cuts to the Kensington Hatchery budget proposed by OPM so that these important programs can continue.

I should note that the FAC supports Representative Tong's bill (HB 6047), which would establish a task force to investigate the tools available to provide for stable and sustainable funding for recreational fishing in general and the hatcheries in particular. We would hope that, assuming HB 6047 secures passage, the Kensington hatchery funding would continue as the Task Force completes its work and the legislature considers its recommendations.

In summary, continuing the programs made possible by the Kensington Hatchery makes sense economically, educationally, and environmentally.