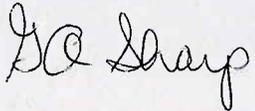




**FISHERIES ADVISORY COUNCIL** - A group of dedicated citizens from all regions of the state working together for fish and fishing in Connecticut.

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Senator Ted Kennedy, Jr., Co-chair, Environment Committee  
Representative James M. Albis, Co-chair, Environment Committee

FROM: Gregory A. Sharp, Esq., Chairman   
Fisheries Advisory Council

DATE: February 26, 2015, Revised March 12, 2015

RE: Testimony in Support of H.B. 6047

The Fisheries Advisory Council 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, Coastal Conservation Association 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.

The FAC supports the effort to find an alternative method of funding the hatcheries and the recreational fishing programs in Connecticut outlined in HB 6047.

Unfortunately, funding for the State's recreational fishing programs in general, and the hatcheries in particular, has become a recurrent problem for the FAC, recreational anglers, and the Department. The Office of Policy and Management (OPM) has put hatchery funding on the chopping block for the last several budget cycles and each time, the legislature restored the funding. Once again this year, OPM has proposed to close the Kensington Hatchery in order to save \$195,000.

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, and is 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 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 the two school programs reach 15,000 students per year in 170 schools throughout the state, according to figures provided by the Department.

Historically, the General Assembly has shifted from dedicated funds for fish and wildlife programs to funding them through the General Fund. The latter approach puts these funds at risk for the kind of budget cuts that are proposed this year. Anglers are understandably upset with the current funding model which requires them to pay license fees and excise taxes on fishing equipment, only to see the programs they fund be cut in tough budget years.

Anglers in Connecticut have demonstrated that they are willing to bear the burden of license fees to pursue their sport. For example, with the support of the angling community, a Marine Waters Fishing License was adopted for the first time in 2009. In 2013 more than 145,000 anglers purchased a marine license. Revenues from the sale of Inland and Marine Fishing Licenses in calendar 2013 was \$4,300,000, while the federal apportionment of excise taxes and motor boat fuel taxes exceeded \$3,000,000.

A healthy, well-funded fishing program not only provides recreational and educational opportunities for Connecticut residents, but it is also a significant revenue generator for the state. The Connecticut Center for Economic Analysis at UConn projects that for every \$1 spent on natural resources, \$38 in economic activity is generated.

For these reasons, the FAC supports a thorough examination of funding options for Connecticut's hatcheries and recreational fishing programs as contemplated by Representative Tong's bill, and we thank him for introducing it. We would ask the Environment Committee to give the bill a Joint Favorable endorsement and work with us to move it forward through the legislative process.

If this bill moves forward, we would, of course hope that the Appropriations Committee would restore the funding for Kensington in the current budget, as closing the hatchery would result in the irrevocable loss of the Connecticut River strain of Atlantic Salmon, the Seeforellen Brown Trout, and the termination of the school programs.