



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

### **TESTIMONY OF THE FISHERIES ADVISORY COUNCIL**

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



Alicea A. Charamut, Secretary  
Fisheries Advisory Council

DATE: February 24, 2016

RE: Testimony in Support of HB 5316, AAC Sport Fishing Licenses for Anglers who are Over 65 Years of Age or Older, and SB 139, AAC the Authority of the Commissioner of Environmental Protection to Establish a Trout Stamp

Senator Kennedy, Representative Albis and Members of the Environment Committee:

The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection's Fisheries Advisory Council ("FAC") would like to go on record in support of HB 5316 and SB 139 to raise critically needed revenues from anglers themselves to support Connecticut's recreational fishing programs.

Due to timing constraints, the FAC was unable to hold a formal meeting and vote on the two bills, but a poll of the membership indicates support for both bills.

With respect to HB 5316, all members of the Council who responded indicated support for the bill. Currently, anglers 65 years of age or older, must obtain a license to fish, but the license is free. As reflected in the statement of purpose, the bill recognizes that the changing demographic of an aging population means that an increasing number of anglers will be moving past the 65 year mark in the years ahead. It is highly likely that

they will not be replaced at nearly the same rate by new anglers purchasing licenses. That fact will make it increasingly difficult for the Department to raise the revenues necessary to carry out its recreational fishing and cold water conservation programs if the growing population of older anglers can enjoy the privileges of these programs without contributing financially to their support.

The scope of the current free senior licensing program is significant. According to the Department, in 2015, there were more than 31,000 free Marine Waters licenses issued to anglers over 65, compared to only 24,000 paid Marine Waters licenses. On the inland side, there were more than 31,000 free Inland Waters licenses issued to seniors, compared to 39,000 paid licenses. With respect to the All Waters License, there is no separate free license covering All Waters for seniors. Those who wish to fish in both areas simply sign up for the free Inland and free Marine Waters licenses. There were 95,000 paid All Waters licenses issued. In the aggregate, then there were approximately 62,000 free senior licenses issued compared to 160,000 paid licenses, which means that, last year, approximately 28% of all licenses issued were free senior licenses. Obviously, with an aging population, that percentage will likely increase, and a continuation of the present program could potentially lead to a death spiral for the Department's recreational fishing programs and many cold water conservation programs.

In addition, we should note that the Department offered a reduced rate for Inland Waters licenses to 16 and 17 year olds for the first time to encourage more youth participation, and it is essential that the Department be able to continue to offer such incentives and programs to engage youth. If revenues from license sales decline, there may be no choice but to discontinue these efforts to engage our youth.

With respect to SB 139, the consensus was strong in favor of supporting the bill, but not unanimous, as several members preferred an across-the-board increase in license fees, rather than targeting only those anglers fishing for trout. However, the majority view was that, because the cost of operating the three trout hatcheries represents such a significant part of the fisheries budget, it was only fair for the trout fishermen to bear the cost. The other generalized concern about an across the board fee increase is that, historically, it has led to a decline in license sales.

We note that the actual bill, as recently released, carries a statutory cap of \$10. Even at an additional cost of \$10 per year to fish for trout, if that is what the Department decides after the rule-making process, such a fee seems relatively insubstantial in both our view and that of other FAC members, especially considering the expenditures on gas, food, and tackle for a typical day of fishing, and the average angler's investment in equipment. The proposed statutory cap of \$10, of which we were not aware when our poll was taken, may address some of the concerns of those preferring the across the board fee increase.

As noted, the actual fee for the trout stamp will only be determined following the Department's adoption of regulations, so there will be a second opportunity for those

who are concerned to raise their issues, including the impact of a trout stamp fee on non-resident license sales. As in most states, non-residents pay a higher fee than residents for a license, and there was a concern expressed that the trout stamp fee, added to the non-resident fee might deter out of state anglers. Currently, the fee for a resident Inland Waters license is \$28, while a non-resident Inland Waters license is \$55.

It is important to note one issue upon which everyone agreed, and that was a concern about the fate of the additional revenues generated by the two bills, assuming they pass. Ever since special funds were eliminated in 2009, the revenues from license sales have gone to the general fund. In the anglers' eyes, this makes them vulnerable to budgetary manipulation which could re-direct the revenues away from the programs which generated the revenue.

Unfortunately, the legislation the General Assembly adopted in 2009 to address such concerns is not as clear as it might be. As presently written, Section 26-15a only requires appropriations of revenues from fishing and hunting licenses deposited in the general fund to flow back to the Department's Bureau of Natural Resources, which includes the Forestry and Wildlife Programs, as well as the Inland and Marine Fishing Programs.

That existing statute does not require, for example, that funds raised by a trout stamp be earmarked specifically for the trout management and conservation programs. Similarly, the existing legislation does not require that revenues from a new license fee for senior anglers be dedicated to the respective recreational fisheries and conservation programs that generated them. FAC members who have weighed in on this issue believe the bills in question should require the funds raised to flow back to the fisheries programs which generated them.

In closing, I should note that the Council testified in favor of Representative Tong's bill last year to provide for a sustainable hatchery program. We thank him for his efforts, and wish that bill had passed. Since it did not, it is obvious that, in the current budget climate, we must find ways to generate revenue to support the hatcheries and recreational fishing programs in Connecticut. These programs provide significant quality of life benefits to more than 130,000 anglers, generate more than \$4.6 million in direct revenues to the state, earn more than \$3.7 million in federal Sport Fish Restoration funds, and contribute millions of dollars each year to the economy, \$20 million annually from trout anglers alone. In addition to financial benefits, providing an opportunity for recreational fishing for the next generation of anglers is crucial to the Department's mission of encouraging support for conservation and wise resource stewardship.

Thank you for considering the Council's testimony. We urge passage of both bills.