



February 23, 2022

Honorable Christine Cohen, Co-Chair
Honorable Derek Slap, Vice-Chair
Honorable Craig Miner, Ranking Member
Committee on the Environment
General Assembly
State of Connecticut

Honorable Joseph Gresko, Co-Chair
Honorable Christine Palm, Vice-Chair
Honorable Stephen Harding, Ranking Member

**RE: Raised Bill Number HB 5141
AN ACT CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF CERTAIN FISH SPECIES.**

Dear Senators Cohen, Slap and Miner, and Representatives Gresko, Palm and Harding:

The Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk is in support of the effort to protect forage fish, and generally supports HB 5141, but with important changes noted below.

For a number of small, unassuming, often overlooked species of fish, forage fish play an outsized role in supporting the overall marine ecosystem -- and the human economy and food chain on which we depend. A critical link in marine food webs, forage fish are schooling fish like menhaden, anchovies and shad that eat plankton; HB 5141 focuses on two species of silverside, sand lance and bay anchovy. These fish are energy rich and occur in large schools and aggregations, and serve as a critical food source for many species of fish, birds, and marine mammals. In turn, healthy populations of forage fish support recreational and commercial fisheries, as well as growing tourism activities like whale, seal and bird watching.

While healthy forage fish populations are necessary for sustainable and productive ocean and coastal ecosystems, forage fish species are currently under extreme pressure due to habitat loss, fishing pressure, marine pollution, increased demand for aquaculture, and ocean warming and acidification.

While there is a commendable effort at the federal level to amend the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act to address ecosystem-based management of forage fish, forage fish are generally found in nearshore, coastal waters managed by state agencies. Such is the case here in Connecticut. Therefore, it is more important that the state act to protect forage fish in state waters.

We recommend that Section 2 be deleted from the bill, as the goal is to regulate harvest and not possession by licensed bait dealers; and we further defer to the formulation proposed by the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) to achieve the goal of the bill.

Sincerely,

Jason Patlis
President and CEO