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Coastal Conservation Association Virginia

September 4, 2013

Coastal Conservation Association Virginia

Virginia Recreational Fishing Advisory Board

Virginia Marine Resources Commission

2600 Washington Avenue

Newport News, VA 23607

Dear RFAB Members:

The CCA's Government Affairs Committee has reviewed the proposals submitted for the second 2013 cycle and has developed the individual positions noted below.

Additionally, as we strenuously noted the last two years, we view the continued omission of any proposals to enhance/expand the state's **artificial reefs** as a major problem. As we noted in our comments on RFAB projects in March, we applaud efforts by the VMRC staff to facilitate the efficient deployment of donated materials onto existing sites. However, we cannot help but note that there appears to be a continuing decline in support for the expansion and replenishment of the state's artificial reefs. In our separate letter of 26 June, we further expressed our concerns regarding the reef program and suggested (along with the Peninsula Salt Water Fisherman's Association) the allocation of "*\$750,000 dollars of the funds remaining from the 2013 budget to support the Artificial Reef Program while there is an opportunity and funds to do so*". As only a small percentage (8%?) of the current sites are covered with deployed structure, the board should dictate that a continuing financial allocation be a part of every funding cycle for reef enhancement. Finally, the board should entertain the option of developing a program that would allow some degree of corporate sponsorship of selected reefs/sites. Again, we feel no other effort more clearly targets the intent of this fund to directly address the needs of the state's recreational anglers, and hope the board and commission take the necessary steps to ensure our reefs attain the quality and productivity of some of the best counterparts in other states.

2nd Cycle Multi-Year Projects for 2013 Renewal

A. Virginia Game Fish Tagging (Year 20), \$77,672. SUPPORT. The comments we provided from the seven previous years continue to reflect our perspective on this vital program and database. *"We remain committed to supporting this valuable, long-standing program. By continuing to provide critical data on virtually every recreationally significant species, it has been extremely important in the successful management of our saltwater fishery. As we have noted previously, the program not only contributes valuable finfish data for scientific and management communities, but also attracts an expanding cadre of volunteer taggers who have helped expand the conservation ethic through their efforts"*.

B. 2014 Estimating Relative Abundance of Young-of-Year American Eel in the Virginia Tributaries of Chesapeake Bay (Yr12), \$51,676. DO NOT SUPPORT. We remain opposed to the use of recreational funds to support this project. While the commercial fund was considered for a portion of the study during a previous cycle, this is not the case this year, -- only heightening our opposition as reflected in prior cycles -- *"...our objections to this project were based primarily on its limited benefit to the recreational angling community. Consequently, we felt funding for this and other related projects on eel research should be sought from the commercial fund. Previous arguments that eels are of growing significance as the bait of choice for species such as striped bass and cobia do not constitute sufficient rationale for use of our shrinking recreational license dollars."* Consequently, we still feel the commercial sector should be the source for funding this project.

Dedicated to Conserving, Protecting and Restoring Virginia's Coastal Fisheries

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C. Federal Assistance (Wallop-Breaux) Matching Funds, Federal FY 2014, \$301,704. **DO NOT SUPPORT.** Our members remain opposed to this method of matching, and our comments from past cycles continue to portray our frustration with the process: *“Even though other agencies are contributing to the match in this cycle, the recreational fund is being tapped (as was the case in prior cycles) to provide a disproportionate amount of the necessary match. The situation is further aggravated in that the commercial fund will provide absolutely zero to the match in this cycle. Such funding inequity only exacerbates the situation in which the recreational sector is expected to carry the load in order to preserve federal assistance to the program”, and “any future requests for WB offset should be financed entirely from the commercial fund, given the rationale that the WB federal portion is itself derived indirectly from the recreational sector”, and “that it is important the RFAB stands firm in demanding 100% of matching funding be derived from the commercial industry in all subsequent funding cycles”.*

D. Cooperative (VMRC, VA Tech, ASMFC) Efforts to Utilize Alternative Methods for the Upcoming Stock Assessment of Weakfish, \$20,000. **PARTIAL SUPPORT.** Unlike an earlier initiative in a similar vein (“Improving stock assessment for weakfish 07’- 10’), this study is receiving financial support from ASMFC. As a result, the portion required from VMRC is a relatively modest sum. While any effort that supports the recovery and subsequent intelligent management of weakfish is to be applauded, our support is qualified in that we feel a portion of any local funding should be derived from the commercial sector, which has heavily targeted this species in the past, and would benefit greatly from the recovery of the resource.

2nd Cycle New Projects for 2014

E. Town of Saxis Pier Enhancement Project, \$49,600. **SUPPORT.** This project certainly seems to be aligned to one of the key goals of the fund – namely, to provide quality access to members of the recreational angling community. The unique combination of pier protection and environmental enhancement may prove to be a model for other structures in the future.

F. Patterns in Prey Selectivity of Key Sportfishes in Chesapeake Bay, \$38,446. **PARTIAL SUPPORT.** An intriguing project that would seem to be very useful in providing data critical to not only the wise management of the three species initially targeted, but also towards overall Bay ecosystem management. The petitioner’s introductory statement accurately notes the historical recreational importance of striped bass, summer flounder, and weakfish. However, these are also the three species that have been, and continue to be, prime targets of the commercial sector. Therefore, it would only seem fair that the commercial fund should be solicited for at least a portion of the amount requested from the VMRC.

G. Genetic Investigation into the Distinctiveness of Tautog off the Coast of Virginia, \$76,031. **SUPPORT.** We feel this endeavor has the potential to finally shed light on the nature of tautog frequenting Virginia waters. Many have long surmised the population inhabiting our waters are separate from the stock to the north, and should therefore be managed/regulated to reflect this reality. This important recreational species (with a slower growth rate than many fish) can be subject to localized angling depletion and requires as much fact-based analysis and wise management as possible.

H. Speckled Trout in Virginia: Are These Fish Genetically Distinct?, \$70,005. **SUPPORT.** Speckled trout are yet another species that is proportionately of much greater importance to the recreational sector, and whose population is not fully understood in regards to its genetic identity in relation to overall populations along the Atlantic coast. It is our hope the study will provide the necessary information and insight necessary to manage what was a “niche” species that has now grown into a more frequently sought species by Virginia anglers. The commercial stress on the species in North Carolina, and the recent commercial catch overage in Virginia further highlights the need for better understanding of the local stocks and their wise management.

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Hopefully, this project will shed light on their relative importance to the overall stock in the lower bay region, as well as provide the data necessary to enact management to preserve this relatively small but important resource.

As in the past, we appreciate the opportunity to express our views on the allocation of our state's license funds. Additionally, we again urge you to allocate funds necessary to the continued development of our state's reef program. Thank you for your consideration.

Larry Snider
Chairman, CCA Virginia

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