

August 8, 2013

Jack Travelstead, Commissioner
Virginia Marine Resources Commission
2600 Washington Avenue, 3rd Floor
Newport News, VA 23607



Wegmans



Dear Mr. Travelstead:

We are writing to express our shared concern over the lack of catch restrictions for Atlantic cownose rays (*Rhinoptera bonasus*), also known as the Chesapeake Ray, and the associated risk for overfishing. In order to ensure the sustainability of this exceptionally vulnerable species and associated fishing operations, we request your leadership in initiating state assessment and management efforts, as a matter of priority.

As you are likely aware, Virginia-based fishing interests have made significant progress in promoting new markets for cownose rays. Wegmans and J.J. McDonnell are very much interested in continuing to sell and promote the product, provided improvements are made to better understand and manage the fishery. Whereas our organizations represent differing perspectives, we are united in our commitment to seafood sustainability through science-based fisheries management, and in our recognition that sharks and rays are generally low productivity species. Cownose rays, as you will recall, usually produce just one pup per year after age seven. It is clear that sound stewardship of such species requires prompt attention and a particularly cautious approach.

While the life history characteristics of cownose rays and associated risk for depletion are widely accepted, there are conflicting perceptions of cownose population levels and trends. There is an urgent need for a dedicated population assessment and other targeted scientific investigations to determine the current stock status as well as safe levels of fishing mortality. In the meantime, for the sake of the population and those invested in its future harvest, precautionary limits are warranted to ensure that fishing effort on this species does not increase.

We therefore urge your assistance in:

- securing an immediate cap on cownose ray landings in Virginia;
- establishing an expert panel to develop cownose ray management recommendations based on population and/or ecological risk assessment; and
- engaging officials and stakeholders from other Mid-Atlantic states in similar efforts.

We are confident that your expertise in shark fisheries management will be a great asset in expediting the actions necessary to prevent the predictable and unnecessary collapse of an important marine resource.

We thank you for your consideration and offer our assistance in achieving these goals.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sonja Fordham".

Sonja Fordham
President
Shark Advocates International

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Carl Salamone".

Carl Salamone
Vice President for Seafood
Wegmans Food Markets

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kurt Friesland".

Kurt Friesland
Sales/Product Development
J.J. McDonnell Seafood