

November 3, 2025

Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission
2000 Quail Drive
Baton Rouge, LA 70808

Dear Commissioners,

As organizations representing hundreds of thousands of Louisianans from the recreational fishing, boating, and conservation community, we urge you to vote no on developing a Notice of Intent that would reduce Louisiana's current menhaden fishing buffer zones.

The existing buffers are working as intended. The Commission established these buffers in 2024 after extensive public input and scientific review to balance industrial harvest with the protection of Louisiana's nearshore ecosystems and public fisheries. That decision reflected the Department's statutory responsibility to conserve and manage fishery resources for the greatest public benefit and long-term sustainability. Advancing the NOI to reduce the buffer zones represents a clear abdication of the Commission's responsibility to serve the people and natural resources of Louisiana, including the health of coastal fisheries and habitats, and risks damaging the public's trust in the Commission's commitment to responsible resource management throughout Sportsman's Paradise.

Louisiana's Nearshore Habitats Must Be Protected

Louisiana's nearshore zone is among the most productive – and most vulnerable – areas along the Gulf Coast. These shallow areas serve as critical nursery and feeding grounds for redfish, speckled trout and other sportfish that support a \$3.7 billion recreational fishing economy. Allowing large industrial vessels that draw more than 10 feet to operate in areas sometimes less than six feet deep exposes these areas to prop scarring, sediment disturbance and purse net impacts, increasing habitat degradation. Maintaining the existing buffers is a sensible safeguard to limit these risks while still providing ample fishing grounds for the menhaden fleet.

Reducing Bycatch and Supporting Sustainable Fisheries is Paramount

The latest and best available science shows significant bycatch from menhaden industry operations along Louisiana's shorelines. An estimated 150 million non-target fish are killed annually, including approximately 30,000 redfish, 240,000 speckled trout, 25 million white trout and more than 80 million croakers. Reducing the buffer zones would increase these interactions, particularly during spawning periods when redfish aggregate nearshore. The current buffers serve as a precautionary management tool consistent with Louisiana's fisheries conservation objectives and the Department's mission to sustain healthy, diverse fish stocks.

Public Trust in Responsible Resource Management Must Be Upheld

The current buffer regulations were a direct response to years of public concern about fish kills, habitat damage, and conflicts between industrial and recreational vessels. Maintaining the buffers reinforces public confidence in the Commission's commitment to unbiased, transparent and science-based decision making. Weakening them now, without any scientific justification, risks eroding that trust and reigniting user group conflicts, sending the message that industry convenience outweighs conservation, public access, and responsible management of our shared coastal resources.

Louisiana's coastal ecosystems are already facing extraordinary pressure from habitat loss and storm impacts. The current buffer zones represent a modest but effective safeguard – one that aligns with the Department's mandate to manage fisheries for long-term sustainability and public benefit. For these reasons, we urge you to maintain the existing menhaden fishing buffer zones and decline to advance this Notice of Intent.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Angler Action Foundation

Bonefish & Tarpon Trust

Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation

Guy Harvey Foundation

International Game Fish Association

Louisiana Charter Boat Association

Marine Retailers Association of the Americas

Mississippi Wildlife Federation

National Audubon Society

The Origins Foundation

Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership