

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
February 27, 2008

CONTACT:  
Tom Rudolph, 508-776-8056  
Lara Slifka, 508-945-2432

### **Bill Would Invest in the Bay State's Commercial and Recreational Fisheries**

CHATHAM, Mass.—Lawmakers from Cape Cod concerned about the health of Massachusetts' fisheries and fishermen have designed a plan to work with diverse fishery stakeholders in order to safeguard the health of keystone herring and mackerel stocks for future generations, along with the health of all the marine predators and fishing businesses that depend on them.

The proposal is part of the Environmental Bond Bill (H 4446), and was originally sponsored by State Rep. Sarah Peake of Provincetown. The Environmental Bond Bill will provide funding for a variety of important environmental projects across the state, including the important fishery monitoring program proposed by Rep. Peake.

If approved the bill would greatly improve the management of herring and mackerel stocks, which are central to the diets of cod, haddock, striped bass, tuna, and numerous other species and thus critical to the region's commercial and recreational fisheries. Not to mention to the lobstermen who rely on the fish for bait.

"I was happy to file an amendment to the Environmental Bond Bill to work with the state and industry in developing a shore based monitoring program for small mesh pelagic fisheries," said Rep. Peake. "Herring are a critical part of the food web and many species of marine mammals, sea birds, and fish depend on abundant populations of herring for their health and survival."

Today, the majority of the region's herring and mackerel are harvested by midwater trawlers, ships up to 165-feet long that use small-mesh nets dragged through the water. The scale of the fishery has provided a special challenge to managers and biologists who struggle to keep track of the impact the vessels have on the forage stocks as well as numerous other species that can get caught in the giant nets. The high volume of their catch and landings, along with the fact that the fish are pumped into and out of the vessel, presents unique monitoring challenges that the new program would address.

For example, fisheries experts believe that a lack of monitoring of the midwater fleet has contributed to the persistent decline of severely imperiled river herring populations.

"As a State Herring warden I am very pleased to hear of the efforts put forth by the Environmental Bond Bill to help create a more accountable data system for the pelagic small-mesh fisheries operating in our state waters, through the development of a shore-based monitoring system," said Jeff Hughes of Wellfleet. "The scientific data to be gained from knowing the amount of Alewife and blue-back Herring (known collectively as River Herring) that are landed as by-catch will help us understand the reasons for their decline."

The plan, modeled on systems currently used to manage similar fisheries in Alaska and Oregon, would work with numerous marine resource stakeholders to create the modern infrastructure needed to protect resources from over exploitation and preserve economic flexibility for the industry.

The investment, not to exceed \$750,000 in technology, personnel and infrastructure, coupled with legislated standards for landings monitoring and reporting, will place the Commonwealth at the forefront of fisheries data collection, and lead to sustainability and new economic opportunity for numerous sectors in the fishing industry.

More specifically, the plan will provide funding for cutting edge technology that would provide actual weights on all landed fish rather than the current system which relies on estimates provided by the fishermen and dealers. In addition it would fund the creation of a shore-based fishery observer program to ensure all the fish unloaded in the fishery is classified by species. The program would be modeled on monitoring programs developed for similar fisheries in the U.S. and Canada.

The bill came out of the committee on the Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture with an “ought to pass” recommendation on February 14, 2008.

###