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American Saltwater Guides Association Sets the Record Straight Regarding Misconceptions and Inaccurate Statements Made by Representative Lee Zeldin (NY)

Oceanside, NY – June 10, 2019 - The American Saltwater Guides Association (“ASGA”), a coalition of forward-thinking guides, small business owners and like-minded anglers who understand the value of keeping fish in the water, today responded to misconceptions and inaccurate statements made by Representative Lee Zeldin (NY-1st District) in a press release that was issued by his office on May 23, 2019 and an op-ed published on May 28, 2019.

The statements made by Rep. Zeldin misrepresent the recent actions taken by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) and the current management status of a number of species, including striped bass, black sea bass and summer flounder. Further, they suggest a fundamental misunderstanding of fisheries management and the species being discussed. The ASGA is seeking a meeting with Rep. Zeldin to discuss these inaccuracies and the intentions of the ASMFC delegates, however has not received any response to its request from his office. It hopes to work collaboratively with the congressman on fishery management for the benefit of all anglers in New York and other coastal states.

“The ASGA was founded with the mission of promoting sustainable business through conservation,” said Peter Jenkins, Chairman of the ASGA Board of Directors. “As a group founded by fishing guides and small business owners, we understand as well as anyone that abundant fish stocks and sustainable fishery management is crucial to the lasting viability of our businesses and livelihoods. Given the critical importance of accurate and reliable information to responsible management, we felt obligated to publicly respond to Representative Zeldin’s misconceptions and inaccurate statements and to correct the record for our members and all those who rely on abundant fish stocks, whether recreationally or commercially.”

Specifically, the press release issued by Rep. Zeldin included:

MISCONCEPTION: “New York fishermen faced a major blow due to ASMFC’s decision to cut the Atlantic Striped Bass fishery by up to 17% next year and maintain the current ban on striped bass fishing in the Block Island Sound Transit Zone. Rather than rooting these decisions in local stock assessments... the ASMFC used flawed data that measures the Atlantic Striped Bass stock based on the entire eastern seaboard.”

REALITY: Striped bass spawn in several distinct locations, primarily the Chesapeake Bay, Delaware Bay and Hudson River, and migrate to those locations in the spring and up and down the coast throughout the year. As a result of the migratory nature of striped bass, there are no 'local stocks' to assess. The recommendation to reduce striped bass mortality by 17% in 2019 was based on the best available science stock assessment, which passed peer-review by a panel of respected fisheries scientists and found striped bass to be overfished with overfishing continuing to occur.

INACCURACY: "Last year, the ASMFC cut New York's Black Sea Bass quota by 12%."

REALITY: New York's recreational anglers received a 2% INCREASE in its black sea bass catch limit in 2018. While the ASMFC did originally plan to cut New York's 2018 recreational black sea bass allocation by 12%, the hard work of New York's representatives to the ASMFC and their counterparts in New England led to an increase in the limit.

MISCONCEPTION: "No progress was made in rectifying New York's already inequitable quotas for species across the board, including Black Sea Bass, Striped Bass and Fluke (at this month's ASMFC spring meeting)."

REALITY: The ASGA does not argue that New York's commercial fluke quota may be inequitable, however such quotas are not established by the ASMFC, but rather by the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council. Further, New York is currently suing federal fishery managers over that quota, so it is difficult to understand what more Rep. Zeldin might expect.

MISCONCEPTION: "Last year, the House of Representatives passed the Strengthening Fishing Communities and Increasing Flexibility in Fisheries Management Act (H.R. 200), which would improve federal fisheries law so that regulations and quotas can be more transparent, equitable, and fair, improving data collection and science and ending the current arbitrary ten year rebuilding timeline, by replacing it with a more flexible approach that helps fishermen while preserving important fisheries."

REALITY: H.R. 200 introduced potential loopholes into the management of federal fisheries that would have allowed managers to ignore best available science in favor of other factors, including economic, that would have likely resulted in ineffective regulations. Further, H.R. 200 would have allowed for overfishing on a species that is declining for reasons other than overfishing. For example, if a species declined due to environmental reasons, quotas could be maintained at status quo, thus ignoring best available science to the detriment of the species.

MISCONCEPTION: "New York's third delegate, John McMurray, who has somehow managed to become known as the most notorious and hypocritical anti-fishermen fishermen in the state, is the antithesis of who should be appointed to the ASMFC and must be removed. Not only has he proven to be an ineffective advocate, he has repeatedly villainized the very hardworking Long Islanders he is supposed to represent... With their livelihoods relying on the health and vitality of our community's waterways, there's no doubt our area's fishermen are committed to protecting and preserving our environment, but when New Jersey fishermen are catching twice the fish in the same waters, New York fishermen are unfairly bearing the burden."

REALITY: Capt. McMurray is a consummate professional with the best interest of the resource and the fishermen that depend on it at heart. He is an ardent leader in marine conservation and his values represent countless anglers in New York as well as up and down the Atlantic Coast. He has decades of experience managing the state and federal fisheries off the coast of New York, and is the epitome of the hardworking Long Islanders he does represent. He is owner and operator of One More Cast Charters out of Oceanside, New York, relying on the same fish stocks that other commercial and recreational anglers on Long Island do. Further, he has served on both the ASMFC, currently sitting on the Striped Bass Advisory Panel and is legislative proxy for NY State Senator Todd Kaminsky, and the Mid Atlantic Fishery Management Council, serving as one of New York's recreational representatives from 2008 to 2017.

About the American Saltwater Guides Association

The American Saltwater Guides Association was created to activate and unite guides, small business owners and like-minded anglers, and to represent them and their voice at the federal, regional and state level. The ASGA is a coalition of forward-thinking guides, small business owners and like-minded anglers who understand the value of keeping fish in the water. We realize that abundance equals opportunity, and that such opportunity is quite a bit more important to the future of fishing than low size limits and full coolers. More information about the ASGA, its mission, board members and current areas of focus can be found at www.saltwaterguidesassociation.org.