

Department of Legislative Services  
Maryland General Assembly  
2003 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 734

(Delegate O'Donnell)(By Request)

Environmental Matters

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Natural Resources - Commercial Crabbing - Trotlines

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This bill prohibits a person licensed to catch crabs for commercial purposes from setting or fishing a trotline within one-half mile of another trotline set or fished by the licensed person.

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Fiscal Summary

**State Effect:** The bill would not materially affect State finances.

**Local Effect:** None.

**Small Business Effect:** Potential meaningful. The bill would have a negative impact on any commercial crab licensee who currently sets trotlines within one-half mile of another of the licensee's trotlines.

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Analysis

**Current Law:** Any person who owns or is in charge of operating a vessel used to catch crabs in the waters of the State for commercial purposes must be licensed. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) also regulates individuals that set trotlines to catch crabs recreationally. Current regulations prohibit a person (commercial or recreational) from setting or fishing a trotline within 100 feet of another trotline.

**Background:** In the past several years, the blue crab harvest has decreased substantially. In 1993 the Maryland commercial blue crab harvest totaled about 57 million pounds; landings since 1998 have been half, or less than half, of that amount. Given the scarcity

of habitat combined with the intensity of the fishing effort, there is great concern in both Maryland and Virginia regarding the biological stability of blue crabs.

In 1999 the Chesapeake Bay Commission's Bi-State Blue Crab Advisory Committee began a two-year study to determine the status of the blue crab fishery. The committee's final report, published in January 2001, found that the fishery was near collapse. As a first step toward rehabilitation, a 15% reduction in fishing effort over a period of three years was recommended. To meet that reduction goal, Maryland, Virginia, and the Potomac River Fisheries Commission implemented regulations in 2001 restricting both the commercial crabbing industry as well as recreational crabbers. In Maryland, regulations effective for the 2002 crabbing season established additional restrictions on the commercial crabbing industry.

**State Effect:** According to DNR, the Natural Resources Police (NRP) would be unable to enforce the bill's prohibition for several reasons. First, it is unclear as to whether the bill's distance requirement applies to line-of-sight across water or whether it extends across points of land and small peninsulas. Second, the distance between trotlines is so great that it would be virtually impossible for NRP to determine if a licensee had violated the bill's prohibition.

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### **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** None.

**Cross File:** None.

**Information Source(s):** Department of Natural Resources, Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - February 28, 2003  
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