



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

Environmental Protection and Restoration
Environmental Education

Senate Bill 510

Natural Resources – Commercial Fishing – Use of Haul Seines

DATE: FEBRUARY 25, 2020

POSITION: **OPPOSE**

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation recommends an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 510 to protect sensitive fish species from mortality as haul seine bycatch and ensure enforceability of haul seining laws and regulations. Senate Bill 510 would extend the hours during which a commercial fisherman may empty a haul seine net set on a Friday to sunrise the following Monday.

Haul seines are one of the oldest fishing methods in the Chesapeake Bay region. Haul seines were once used extensively to harvest American shad but have greatly decreased in number as shad populations declined. These large nets are drawn out into the water from near the shoreline and fish are swept into the net as the two ends of the net are brought together in the shallows. This method of fishing is non-selective – it captures everything in the path of the net. In some cases, this could include protected or sensitive species, such as Atlantic sturgeon. In many cases, fish or other organisms that are not the target species can be removed alive from the net when the net is actively fished.

Senate Bill 510 would allow a haul seine fisherman to set his net on Friday and empty the net any time between 12:01 am on Saturday through the following Monday at sunrise. This raises significant concerns about the survival of non-target fish and other bycatch species if the net is left for up to three days after being set. Considering haul seines are a non-selective gear this could result in significant losses of non-target species.

There is still a general prohibition on fishing with a haul seine on the weekends. Only certain counties (Baltimore, Harford, and Kent) are excepted from the prohibition, and only when prior notification is made to the Department of Natural Resources. SB 510's allowance for haul seines to be emptied on the weekend may make the prohibition on haul seine fishing on the weekends much more difficult to enforce. In most cases, it will not be possible for Natural Resources Police to determine whether a seine net emptied on the weekend was set legally on a Friday or illegally on Saturday morning.

For these reasons, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation recommends an UNFAVORABLE report on SB 510 from the Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee. Please contact Dr. Allison Colden at acolden@cbf.org or 443-482-2160 with any questions.

Maryland Office • Philip Merrill Environmental Center • 6 Herndon Avenue • Annapolis • Maryland • 21403
Phone (410) 268-8816 • Fax (410) 280-3513

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) is a non-profit environmental education and advocacy organization dedicated to the restoration and protection of the Chesapeake Bay. With over 300,000 members and e-subscribers, including over 107,000 in Maryland alone, CBF works to educate the public and to protect the interest of the Chesapeake and its resources.