



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

*Environmental Protection and Restoration
Environmental Education*

House Bill 512

Natural Resources – Fish and Fisheries – Reporting Requirements

Date: February 16, 2024

To: House Environment & Transportation Committee

Position: **Favorable**

From: Allison Colden
MD Executive Director

Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **SUPPORTS** House Bill 512 which provides the Department of Natural Resources the flexibility to require harvest reporting for fish and fisheries according to regulations developed by DNR, rather than via paper forms. This commonsense legislation continues recent efforts to modernize and streamline agency processes while providing multiple options for fishery participants to comply with reporting regulations.

Timely and accurate data is critical to the responsible and sustainable management of Maryland's natural resources, particularly its fisheries. Fisheries-dependent data, including harvest reports, dealer buy tickets, and daily trip logs, are a crucial component of fisheries stock assessments at the state level and those conducted by other management bodies, including the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission.

Currently, many fisheries report via paper forms which are mailed to the Department or turned in at service centers throughout the state. These paper forms must then be entered manually into databases, which can often take months to complete and require close quality control checks to ensure data is entered correctly. Lost or missing paper reports further lengthen the timeline. Paper reporting also limits the management approaches the Department can employ, as in-season changes based on harvest data are not possible, limiting DNR's flexibility and adaptability during the fishing season.

DNR does not have any mandatory requirements for electronic harvest reporting. However, the IT infrastructure for electronic reporting does already exist as voluntary electronic reporting programs that included greater flexibility, higher catch limits or other inducements have been in place for several years. Comments from watermen and charter boat captains at various public meetings have indicated strong support for more flexible reporting approaches from those who have used these systems.

HB 512 would provide DNR the ability to explore options for harvest reporting and provide flexibility to watermen and fishermen who prefer alternatives to paper reporting. It also can provide more accurate and timely data with fewer opportunities for human error and is a critical next step in updating and modernizing Maryland's fisheries management.

CBF urges the Committee's FAVORABLE report on HB 512.

For more information, please contact Matt Stegman, Maryland Staff Attorney, at mstegman@cbf.org.

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