

## **HB947\_Del SampleHughes\_FAV**

Uploaded by: Delegate Sample-Hughes Delegate Sample-Hughes

Position: FAV



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony for House Bill 947 -- **Department of Natural Resources - Commercial Blue and Flathead Catfish Finfish Trotline License – Alterations – FWA**

Good afternoon, Chair Korman, Vice Chair Guyton, and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee.

My name is Andrew Gold. I'm an intern for Delegate Sheree Sample-Hughes and a student at the University of Maryland, College Park. I'm pleased to present **HB 947** on behalf of Delegate Sample-Hughes, and I request this committee to adopt a favorable report with amendments on the bill.

The invasive Blue Catfish is spreading exponentially in the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries, wreaking havoc on the local ecosystem. Their **large size, insatiable appetite, and lack of natural predators** have created an imminent threat to local populations of bay aquatic life, such as the iconic **Maryland Blue Crab**<sup>1</sup>.

Conversations with advocates from the Watermen's Caucus, including Robert T. Brown, have identified this as a crucial issue facing the Chesapeake and its fisheries. The way to mitigate this problem is through supporting and encouraging the harvest and consumption of blue catfish. However, the current legal gill net size of up to **3<sup>1/2</sup> inches** is too small to effectively harvest the fish and keep up with market demand.

HB 947 aims to equip watermen in Maryland with the proper tools to maximize their harvest of Blue Catfish and curb the spread of the invasive species with an amendment launching **the Invasive Blue Catfish Gill Net Pilot Program**. The goals of this program are as follows.

- Increase commercial harvest by updating the max gill net size permitted to catch blue catfish to up to **7-inch** mesh.
- **Study and designate areas** within the Chesapeake Bay in which gill nets to pose the lowest risk of bycatch to prevent harm to nontarget aquatic life.
- Analyze license fee structure under the program.

HB 947 provides a way to **reduce and control** the population of Blue Catfish in the Bay by **increasing commercial harvests** and stimulating one of Maryland's most important

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<sup>1</sup> (University of Maryland Extension, 2020)

industries, without causing unnecessary collateral damage. I want to thank both DNR and the Waterman's caucus for working to create a responsible, environmentally conscious, and economically beneficial approach to a critical issue facing the Chesapeake Bay, which is why I humbly ask this committee for a favorable report with amendments on the bill.

# **HB947 SB610 Commercial Blue and Flathead Catfish F**

Uploaded by: Jeff Harrison

Position: FAV



**Talbot Watermen Association, Inc.**

P.O. Box 324 • Bozman, MD 21612 • (410) 745-9759 • [info@talbotwatermen.org](mailto:info@talbotwatermen.org)

February 24, 2026

The Honorable Brian Feldman  
Chair, Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
2 West Miller Senate Office Building  
11 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Marc Korman  
Chair, Environment & Transportation Committee  
251 Taylor House Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chair Feldman, Chair Korman, and Members of the Committee,

We are writing to express our **support** for **House Bill 947/Senate Bill 610 - Department of Natural Resources - Commercial Blue and Flathead Catfish Finfish Trotline License - Alterations.**

Blue Catfish and Flathead Catfish are invasive species that pose a significant threat to both Chesapeake Bay restoration efforts and the commercial fishing industry. With the ability to live for more than 20 years and grow to over 100 pounds, they are preying on some of the Bay's most important species. With few natural predators, increasing commercial harvest is one of the most effective management tools Maryland can deploy. House Bill 947/Senate Bill 610 will expand harvest opportunities and help protect our native species.

We thank you in advance for your consideration and respectfully request a favorable report for House Bill 947/Senate Bill 610.

Sincerely,

Herman Jeffrey Harrison  
President

Contact:

Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio  
R&R Solutions, LLC  
(443) 786-2137

[jeannie@randrsolutions.us](mailto:jeannie@randrsolutions.us)

# **HB947.FAVORABLE.ShoreRivers.pdf**

Uploaded by: Zack Kelleher

Position: FAV



## Testimony in Support of House Bill 947 – Natural Resources -Commercial Blue and Flathead Catfish Finfish Trotline License - Alterations

February 27, 2026

Dear Chairman Korman,

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in **SUPPORT** of **HB947** on behalf of ShoreRivers. ShoreRivers is a river protection organization on Maryland's Eastern Shore with more than 2,000 members. *Our mission is to protect Maryland's Eastern Shore waterways through science-based advocacy, restoration, education, and engagement.*

This legislation **alters the commercial blue and flathead catfish finfish trotline license to allow a person to use a gill net with a mesh size of not more than 7 inches.** These regulations will improve the fisheries for these invasive species, which wreak ecological and economic devastation on our Chesapeake ecosystem. Blue and channel catfish threaten native fish populations—they are aggressive, adapt to a variety of water conditions, and can outcompete native fish for food and resources. They have proliferated throughout the Bay watershed due to these aggressive tendencies, and while recreational fishermen do catch some, it is really our commercial watermen who make the largest impact in reducing the population of these invasive species. These invasive species pose a major risk to commercial fisheries throughout the Bay, and particularly on the Eastern Shore where many of our commercial watermen operate.

Many critical Chesapeake species such as blue crabs, eels, striped bass, and white perch are struggling due to the prevalence of these catfish, which significantly reduces the success and viability of our commercial fisheries. The more these harmful fish species are removed from our local waterways, the healthier our aquatic ecosystems and local economies will be. **Removing as many invasive blue and channel catfish as possible will support Maryland's commitment to improving the health of Chesapeake Bay and supporting the local community that depends on clean water and thriving native ecosystems.** Improving regulations to the fishery will help drive the demand for more of these harmful invasive fish to be caught and consumed.

For these reasons, ShoreRivers **urges a favorable report on House Bill 947** and encourages the legislature to support policies that invest in watershed health and resilient natural systems across Maryland.

Sincerely,

**Zack Kelleher, Sassafras Riverkeeper** on behalf of:

### ShoreRivers

Scott Budden, Executive Director

Annie Richards, Chester Riverkeeper | Matt Pluta, Choptank Riverkeeper

Ben Ford, Miles Wye Riverkeeper | Zack Kelleher, Sassafras Riverkeeper

**HB0947\_DNR\_SWA\_ENT\_2-27-26.pdf**

Uploaded by: Lydia McPherson

Position: FWA



Wes Moore, Governor  
Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor  
Josh Kurtz, Secretary  
David Goshorn, Deputy Secretary

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February 27, 2026

**BILL NUMBER: HOUSE BILL 947 - FIRST READER**

**SHORT TITLE: DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES – COMMERCIAL BLUE AND FLATHEAD CATFISH FINFISH TROTLINE LICENSE – ALTERATIONS**

**DEPARTMENT’S POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS**

### **EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT’S POSITION**

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The Department supports HB 947 with an amendment. The bill, as written, could have significant unintended consequences to unwanted bycatch, including striped bass. Additionally, the Blue and Flathead Catfish Finfish Trotline License is an unlimited \$15 license. This would open up a commercial harvest gear type with high bycatch mortality to an unlimited number of individuals who pay a significantly smaller amount for their license than a tidal fish licensee.

Recently, the agency’s Invasive Catfish Advisory Committee made recommendations to the agency about gill net use and based on those recommendations, the agency has moved forward with creating a pilot program for next year that would seek to obtain more information from gill net users and areas where there is high bycatch with sensitive species versus areas with a high volume of invasive catfish.

The agency would support the bill with an amendment to remove the current gill net allowance under the \$15 license, add the pilot that is currently being created to the existing list of pilot programs for invasive catfish, and extend the existing sunset of the law until 2030 to accommodate the timeframe to complete a pilot program.

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

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Under current law, only tidal fish licensees with finfish harvester licenses or unlimited tidal fish licenses are currently allowed to use gill nets, and only a subgroup of those licensees have striped bass permits, which allow the use of 7-inch, stretch-mesh gill nets.

### **BILL EXPLANATION**

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The bill changes the current Blue and Flathead Catfish Finfish Trotline License to the Blue and Flathead Catfish License and allows licensees to harvest blue catfish with both a finfish trotline and a gill net with a mesh size of not more than 7 inches.

Contact: Lydia McPherson, Director, Legislative and Constituent Services  
[lydia.mcpherson1@maryland.gov](mailto:lydia.mcpherson1@maryland.gov) ♦ 410-260-8113 (office) ♦ 443-875-7785 (cell)

BY:  
(To be offered in the Environment and Transportation Committee)

AMENDMENTS TO HOUSE BILL 947  
(First Reading File Bill)

AMENDMENT NO. 1

On page 1, strike beginning with “**Commercial**” in line 2 down through “**License**” in line 3 and substitute “**Invasive Blue Catfish Pilot Program**”; strike beginning with “commercial” in line 4 down through “license” in line 6 and substitute “Invasive Blue Catfish Pilot Program to add the blue catfish gill net program; and generally relating to the Invasive Blue Catfish Pilot Program”; strike in their entirety lines 8 through 11, inclusive, and substitute:

“Chapter 172 of the Acts of the General Assembly of 2025  
Sections 1 and 2”;

and in line 13, strike “the Laws of Maryland read as follows”.

AMENDMENT NO. 2

On pages 1 through 2, strike in their entirety the lines beginning with line 14 on page 1 through line 15 on page 2.

On page 2, after line 15, insert:

“(a) The Department of Natural Resources, in coordination with the Invasive Catfish Advisory Committee, shall establish the Invasive Blue Catfish Pilot Program.

(b) The purpose of the Pilot Program is to curb the spread of the invasive blue catfish in the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries.

(c) The Pilot Program consists of:

(1) the For–Hire/Commercial Blue Catfish Program;

(2) the Mid– and Lower–Bay Blue Catfish Trotline Program; and

(3) any other program that the Department determines to be effective in curbing the spread of blue catfish in the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries; AND

(4) **THE BLUE CATFISH GILL NET PROGRAM.**

- (d) (1) Under the For–Hire/Commercial Blue Catfish Program, the Department may:
- (i) authorize eligible participants to run for–hire and commercial fishing trips simultaneously; and
  - (ii) make any regulatory or administrative changes it believes will increase the commercial harvest of blue catfish.
- (2) (i) Under the Mid– and Lower–Bay Blue Catfish Trotline Program, the Department shall authorize the use of finfish trotlines south of the William Preston Lane Jr. Memorial Bridge to the maximum extent feasible to harvest blue catfish.
- (ii) The Department may restrict the areas south of the William Preston Lane Jr. Memorial Bridge where finfish trotlines may be used to harvest blue catfish based on potential bycatch, user conflicts, or other issues it considers relevant.
- (e) In implementing the Pilot Program, the Department shall consider for the harvest of blue catfish:
- (1) authorizing the use of electrofishing;
  - (2) authorizing the use of finfish trotlines of up to 2,400 feet in length;
  - (3) eliminating any limits on the number of hooks used on a finfish trotline; and
  - (4) authorizing the use of hooks that are not corrodible.
- (f) The Department shall:
- (1) expand the use of practices determined to be effective under the Pilot Program throughout the duration of the Pilot Program; and
  - (2) continue to implement and update the Pilot Program until the termination date of this Act.
- (g) [On or before December 1, 2025, the Department shall report to the Governor and, in accordance with § 2–1257 of the State Government Article, the General Assembly on its findings and recommendations under the Pilot Program.] ON OR BEFORE DECEMBER 1 OF EACH YEAR, THE DEPARTMENT SHALL SUBMIT A REPORT TO THE SENATE EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE AND THE HOUSE ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE, IN ACCORDANCE WITH § 2–1257 OF THE STATE GOVERNMENT ARTICLE, ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE PILOT PROGRAM DURING THE PRECEDING YEAR, INCLUDING FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS UNDER THE PILOT PROGRAM.

SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act is an emergency measure, is necessary for the immediate preservation of the public health or safety, has been passed by a ye and nay vote supported by three–fifths of all the members elected to each of the two Houses of the General Assembly,

and shall take effect from the date it is enacted. It shall remain effective through June 30, [2026] **2030**, and, at the end of June 30, [2026] **2030**, this Act, with no further action required by the General Assembly, shall be abrogated and of no further force and effect.”

**HB 947 - CBF - UNF.pdf**

Uploaded by: Allison Colden

Position: UNF



# CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

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## House Bill 947

### Department of Natural Resources – Commercial Blue and Flathead Catfish Finfish Trotline License – Alterations

**Date:** February 27, 2026

**To:** House Environment & Transportation Committee

**Position:** **UNFAVORABLE**

**From:** Dr. Allison Colden,  
MD Executive Director

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The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **OPPOSES House Bill 947** which expands the scope of the existing finfish trotline license for blue and flathead catfish to allow licensees to use gill nets with mesh sizes up to 7 inches.

Blue catfish were first introduced in the 1970s and 1980s in Virginia to develop a recreational fishery. Since then, these highly invasive fish have rapidly expanded their range into nearly every Chesapeake Bay tributary. Blue catfish are voracious generalist predators that feed on native species such as menhaden, striped bass, eel, shad, river herring, and blue crabs. In areas where blue catfish populations have been established, catfish make up approximately 75% of the total fish weight of all fish inhabiting the river.

CBF has long supported regulations that would facilitate the commercial harvest and removal of blue catfish to minimize its negative effects, including the creation of the special commercial trotline license that is the subject of HB 947. However, gill nets are a non-specific fishing gear, meaning the nets can capture and kill any species that encounter them, not just catfish. Given the likelihood of interactions with other commercial species (e.g. striped bass, white perch) and federally endangered species (e.g. Atlantic sturgeon), expanding the use of gill nets should be considered carefully.

For example, Maryland's iconic striped bass fishery is currently under significant stress due to six consecutive years of reproductive failure. Since striped bass spend most of their early life in Chesapeake Bay waters, protecting these resident fish so they may grow to a mature, reproductive size is critical. Because of these concerns, commercial striped bass gill nets are limited to a mesh size of 5 to 7 inches to avoid catching under- and oversized striped bass to minimize the number of fish discarded from the net. HB 947 has no such protection, allowing gill nets up to 7 inches, which could include bycatch of striped bass larger than 31 inches. This is of particular concern because 31 inches is the expected size of the 2015 year class of striped bass – the last strong year class currently contributing most to spawning. Allowing the proliferation of non-selective gear with small mesh size to an additional approximately 400 trotline license holders annually could significantly jeopardize striped bass recovery.

Before expanding the gear types used to target catfish, more attention must be paid to the barriers to catfish processing and distribution that limit the market for Maryland's invasive catfish. Without markets and infrastructure to sell catfish into, actions that increase catfish harvest will only serve to drive down the price per pound of catfish and further disincentivize harvesters from targeting them over other high-value species.

**CBF urges the Committee's UNFAVORABLE report on HB 947.**

For more information, please contact Matt Stegman, Maryland Staff Attorney, at [mstegman@cbf.org](mailto:mstegman@cbf.org).

Maryland Office • Philip Merrill Environmental Center • 6 Herndon Avenue • Annapolis • Maryland • 21403