

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
1999 Session

FISCAL NOTE
Revised

House Bill 423 (Delegate Schisler)

Environmental Matters

Fisheries Management - Limited Entry to the Commercial Fishery - Tidal Fish Licenses

This bill extends indefinitely the date from which the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) may convert a tidal fish license with a minimum of three authorizations, of which one is a crabbing authorization, to an unlimited tidal fish license at the time of renewal.

Under current law this practice is only in effect for the license year beginning September 1, 1998.

The target number of tidal fish license authorizations must include authorizations that are renewed between September 1, 1998 and March 31, 1999. Under current law, targets are to be based on the number of authorizations issued in that time period. DNR is authorized to modify the target number of tidal fish license authorizations based on the number of tidal fish licenses with a minimum of three license authorizations, of which one is a crabbing authorization, relinquished annually to the department for conversion to an unlimited tidal fish license.

The bill also repeals the December 31, 2000 sunset date applicable to the apprenticeship program for tidal fish licenses that allows persons to acquire practical experience while on the apprenticeship waiting list.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None. The bill would not materially alter DNR's operations or finances.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: Minimal.

Fiscal Analysis

Background: Chapters 418 and 419 of 1998 (Senate Bill 679 and House Bill 1260) were the product of a workgroup convened by the Department of Natural Resources to develop a viable program that would maintain a control on fishing efforts and at the same time incorporate an avenue for new participants in the fishery. The new limited entry law made 3 major changes to the management of Maryland fisheries. First, the law altered the process for issuing tidal fish licenses by providing that the individuals on the primary waiting list as of December 31, 1997 would receive a license. Second, an apprenticeship program was established to provide a mechanism for individuals to enter the commercial fishery after acquiring practical experience relating to commercial fishing activities. Finally, the law provided for the licensing and regulation of noncommercial crabbing. The law established recreational crabbing license fees for residents and nonresidents and required all fees collected to be deposited in the Fisheries Research and Development Fund for research related to the noncommercial crab catch.

One provision of last year's bill allowed commercial fish licensees with 3 authorizations to convert those authorizations to an unlimited tidal fish license for the license year beginning September 1, 1998 in order to establish caps on the various authorizations and licenses. DNR advises that 100 licensees converted to the unlimited tidal license last year. The bill would allow this practice to continue each year. DNR estimates that 75 licensees could convert this year.

The new limited entry law has been in effect since June 1, 1998. As required by the law, the approximately 650 candidates on the primary waiting list as of December 1, 1997 have been offered tidal fish licenses, bringing the total number of licensees to 6,936. In addition, 186 individuals on the secondary waiting list have entered the apprenticeship program established by the new law. As of November 1998, there were 420 individuals on the waiting list to enter the apprenticeship program.

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

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