

HOUSE BILL 947

M2

EMERGENCY BILL

6lr3556
CF SB 610

By: ~~Delegates Sample–Hughes, Adams, Anderson, Arentz, Beauchamp, Hartman, Hutchinson, Jacobs, Nawrocki, and Szeliga~~ Szeliga, Boyce, Grammer, Healey, and Holmes

Introduced and read first time: February 5, 2026
Assigned to: Environment and Transportation

Committee Report: Favorable with amendments
House action: Adopted
Read second time: March 3, 2026

CHAPTER _____

1 AN ACT concerning

2 ~~Department of Natural Resources – Commercial Invasive Blue and Flathead~~
3 ~~Catfish Finfish Trotline License Pilot Program – Alterations~~

4 FOR the purpose of altering the ~~commercial blue and flathead catfish finfish trotline license~~
5 ~~to allow a person to catch blue catfish with certain gear~~ Invasive Blue Catfish Pilot
6 Program to include the Blue Catfish Gill Net Program; and generally relating to the
7 ~~commercial blue and flathead catfish finfish trotline license~~ Invasive Blue Catfish
8 Pilot Program.

9 BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,
10 ~~Article – Natural Resources Chapter 171 of the Acts of the General Assembly of 2025~~
11 ~~Section 4 – 701.2~~
12 ~~Annotated Code of Maryland~~
13 ~~(2023 Replacement Volume and 2025 Supplement)~~

14 BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,
15 Chapter 172 of the Acts of the General Assembly of 2025

16 SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,
17 That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

18 Chapter 171 of the Acts of 2025

EXPLANATION: CAPITALS INDICATE MATTER ADDED TO EXISTING LAW.

[Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.

Underlining indicates amendments to bill.

~~Strike out~~ indicates matter stricken from the bill by amendment or deleted from the law by amendment.



1 SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND.

2 That:

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

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

7 (c) The Pilot Program consists of:

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

9 (2) the Mid- and Lower-Bay Blue Catfish Trotline Program; [and]

10 (3) THE BLUE CATFISH GILL NET PROGRAM; AND

11 [(3)] (4) any other program that the Department determines to be
12 effective in curbing the spread of blue catfish in the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries.

13 (d) (1) Under the For-Hire/Commercial Blue Catfish Program, the
14 Department may:

15 (i) authorize eligible participants to run for-hire and commercial
16 fishing trips simultaneously; and

17 (ii) make any regulatory or administrative changes it believes will
18 increase the commercial harvest of blue catfish.

19 (2) (i) Under the Mid- and Lower-Bay Blue Catfish Trotline Program,
20 the Department shall authorize the use of finfish trotlines south of the William Preston
21 Lane Jr. Memorial Bridge to the maximum extent feasible to harvest blue catfish.

22 (ii) The Department may restrict the areas south of the William
23 Preston Lane Jr. Memorial Bridge where finfish trotlines may be used to harvest blue
24 catfish based on potential bycatch, user conflicts, or other issues it considers relevant.

25 (e) In implementing the Pilot Program, the Department shall consider for the
26 harvest of blue catfish:

27 (1) authorizing the use of electrofishing;

28 (2) authorizing the use of finfish trotlines of up to 2,400 feet in length;

29 (3) eliminating any limits on the number of hooks used on a finfish trotline;

30 and

1 (4) authorizing the use of hooks that are not corrodible.

2 (f) The Department shall:

3 (1) expand the use of practices determined to be effective under the Pilot
4 Program throughout the duration of the Pilot Program; and

5 (2) continue to implement and update the Pilot Program until the
6 termination date of this Act.

7 (g) On or before December 1, [2025] 2026, AND EACH DECEMBER 1
8 THEREAFTER, the Department shall report to the [Governor] SENATE COMMITTEE ON
9 EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT and THE HOUSE ENVIRONMENT
10 AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE, in accordance with § 2-1257 of the State
11 Government Article, [the General Assembly] on [its] THE ACTIVITIES OF THE PILOT
12 PROGRAM DURING THE IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING YEAR, INCLUDING findings and
13 recommendations under the Pilot Program.

14 SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act is an emergency
15 measure, is necessary for the immediate preservation of the public health or safety, has
16 been passed by a ye and nay vote supported by three-fifths of all the members elected to
17 each of the two Houses of the General Assembly, and shall take effect from the date it is
18 enacted. It shall remain effective through June 30, [2026] 2030, and, at the end of June
19 30, [2026] 2030, this Act, with no further action required by the General Assembly, shall
20 be abrogated and of no further force and effect.

21 Chapter 172 of the Acts of 2025

22 SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,
23 That:

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25 Catfish Advisory Committee, shall establish the Invasive Blue Catfish Pilot Program.

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

28 (c) The Pilot Program consists of:

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

30 (2) the Mid- and Lower-Bay Blue Catfish Trotline Program; [and]

31 (3) THE BLUE CATFISH GILL NET PROGRAM; AND

1 [(3)] (4) any other program that the Department determines to be
2 effective in curbing the spread of blue catfish in the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries.

3 (d) (1) Under the For-Hire/Commercial Blue Catfish Program, the
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8 increase the commercial harvest of blue catfish.

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11 Lane Jr. Memorial Bridge to the maximum extent feasible to harvest blue catfish.

12 (ii) The Department may restrict the areas south of the William
13 Preston Lane Jr. Memorial Bridge where finfish trotlines may be used to harvest blue
14 catfish based on potential bycatch, user conflicts, or other issues it considers relevant.

15 (e) In implementing the Pilot Program, the Department shall consider for the
16 harvest of blue catfish:

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24 Program throughout the duration of the Pilot Program; and

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26 termination date of this Act.

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 7 enacted. It shall remain effective through June 30, [2026] 2030, and, at the end of June
 8 30, [2026] 2030, this Act, with no further action required by the General Assembly, shall
 9 be abrogated and of no further force and effect.

10 ~~Article — Natural Resources~~

11 ~~4-701.2.~~

12 ~~(a) There is a commercial blue and flathead catfish [finfish trotline] license.~~

13 ~~(b) (1) The license authorizes the holder to catch for sale [blue and flathead]~~
 14 ~~IN THE TIDAL WATERS OF THE STATE:~~

15 ~~(i) BLUE CATFISH USING, AS DEFINED IN DEPARTMENT~~
 16 ~~REGULATIONS:~~

17 ~~1. A FINFISH TROTLINE; OR~~

18 ~~2. A GILL NET WITH A MESH SIZE OF NOT MORE THAN 7~~
 19 ~~INCHES; AND~~

20 ~~(ii) FLATHEAD catfish [in the tidal waters of the State] using a~~
 21 ~~finfish trotline, as defined in Department regulations.~~

22 ~~(2) A licensee shall fish in accordance with Department regulations.~~

23 ~~(e) A person who wishes to obtain the license shall complete and submit an~~
 24 ~~application for the license to the Department or any person designated by the Department.~~

25 ~~(d) An applicant for the license does not need to hold a tidal fish license under §~~
 26 ~~4-701 of this subtitle to be eligible for the license.~~

27 ~~(e) The term of the license is 1 year from September 1 through August 31 the~~
 28 ~~following year.~~

29 ~~(f) The annual license fee is \$15.~~

30 ~~(g) A licensee may not transfer a license issued under this section.~~

1 ~~(h) A licensee shall have a commercial blue and flathead catfish [finfish trotline]~~
2 ~~license in the licensee's possession when the licensee fishes under the license.~~

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5 been passed by a yea and nay vote supported by three-fifths of all the members elected to
6 each of the two Houses of the General Assembly, and shall take effect from the date it is
7 enacted.

Approved:

Governor.

Speaker of the House of Delegates.

President of the Senate.