



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

*Environmental Protection and Restoration
Environmental Education*

Senate Joint Resolution 4

Natural Resources – Fishing – Wild-Caught Blue Catfish

Date: January 21, 2021
To: Senate EHEA Committee

Position: Support
Contact: Dr. Allison Colden, acolden@cbf.org

Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **SUPPORTS** SJ 4 which expands opportunities to reduce the population of invasive blue catfish in Chesapeake Bay waters. SJ 4 expresses the opposition of the Maryland General Assembly to the transfer of oversight responsibilities for the processing and inspection of wild catfish from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Invasive Blue Catfish are Detrimental to the Chesapeake Bay Ecosystem

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. The blue catfish's ability to tolerate varying salinities, temperatures, and habitat types make it easy for them to move throughout the Bay. This expansion is especially troublesome as 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. The adverse effects of blue catfish on Maryland's seafood industry and the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem could be catastrophic.

Burdensome Federal Regulations are Hamstringing Efforts to Remove Blue Catfish

In 2017, federal oversight responsibilities for blue catfish harvest and processing were transferred from the FDA to the USDA. Currently, the USDA requires inspectors to be present throughout processing and requires a costly designated processing space. Most processors of blue catfish are small operators who cannot afford the cost of coming up to code. These strict regulations have deflated the commercial blue catfish market and inhibited the possibility of controlling this nuisance species through harvest. Without a viable commercial harvest, blue catfish will continue to invade the Chesapeake Bay and deplete our iconic natural resources.

A report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) noted that transferring catfish inspections to the USDA splits seafood inspection responsibilities between the two agencies and duplicates efforts at a cost of approximately \$14 million annually. The GAO recommended Congress repeal the provisions assigning USDA oversight over catfish inspections. Repealing these provisions and giving FDA responsibility for blue catfish will not only provide economic incentives to the commercial fishing industry but will provide Maryland with an opportunity for cost-effective management of this invasive species.

CBF urges the Committee's FAVORABLE report on SJ 4.

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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 109,000 in Maryland alone, CBF works to educate the public and to protect the interest of the Chesapeake and its resources.