



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

*Environmental Protection and Restoration
Environmental Education*

House Bill 601

Chesapeake Bay and Coastal Sport Fishing License and Recreational Fishing – Pilot Program and Task Force

Date: February 16, 2022

Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Environment and Transportation Committee

From: Allison Colden, Sr. Fisheries Scientist

Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **SUPPORTS** HB 601 which would develop a pilot program for data collection under the Chesapeake Bay and Coastal Sport Fishing License and stand up a Task Force to develop recommendations to improve recreational fisheries data by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

In a recent report on recreational fisheries data focused on Maryland's iconic striped bass fishery, DNR examined the weaknesses and gaps in existing recreational fisheries data collection programs and provided several recommendations for improvement. While the coastwide federal recreational fisheries survey, the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP), provides accurate data at the coastwide and statewide level, as the Program's data is parsed into two-month "waves" and different fishery sectors, the reliability and accuracy diminishes, adding significant uncertainty to management actions at the state level.

One area of significant uncertainty is angler effort – the number of anglers and how many trips each angler takes. Currently, the Chesapeake Bay and Coastal Sport Fishing License ('boat license') allows a licensee to carry unlicensed anglers on their vessel. Unlicensed anglers fishing under this boat license are required to complete a free registration. DNR believes that there is a high level of non-compliance with the free registration, which would impact the accuracy of angler effort data. The proposed pilot program would address this suspected data gap by requiring licensees to report number of trips, fish caught and their disposition, for all anglers fishing under the boat license.

HB 601 would also create a task force of recreational fishing stakeholders, scientists, and DNR staff to develop recommendations for actions that will further improve recreational fisheries data and subsequent fisheries assessments, including actions that will increase DNR's reach to underrepresented and underserved communities. These recommendations will address key data gaps identified by DNR. HB 601 is a positive first step to improving accuracy and timeliness of information key to recreational fisheries management.

CBF urges the Committee's FAVORABLE report on HB 601. For more information, please contact Dr. Allison Colden, Maryland Senior Fisheries Scientist at acolden@cbf.org and 443.482.2160.

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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.