



# CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

*Environmental Protection and Restoration  
Environmental Education*

## **House Bill 63**

Certified Local Farm and Chesapeake Invasive Species Provider Program – Establishment

Date: February 15, 2023

Position: Support

To: House Health & Government Operations Committee

From: Allison Colden, Sr. Fisheries Scientist

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Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **SUPPORTS** HB 63 which would allow state agencies to count the purchase of invasive blue and flathead catfish from Chesapeake Bay seafood dealers towards the statutory goal of purchasing 20% of food from certified local farm enterprises. Specifically, it defines licensed seafood dealers as “certified Chesapeake Bay invasive species providers” and defines invasive species as those identified as high priority by the Maryland Aquatic Nuisance Species Management Plan.

Blue and flathead catfish were first introduced in the 1970s and 1980s in Virginia to develop a recreational fishery. Since then, these invasive fish have 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 weight of all fish inhabiting the river. The Chesapeake Bay Program’s Invasive Catfish Management Strategy, published in August 2020, identifies increased commercial fisheries harvest as a priority management strategy.

HB 63 would create greater demand for blue and flathead catfish product, increasing the profitability for Maryland watermen at minimal or no additional cost to the state. Increased harvest would help reduce the predation of invasive catfish on native species while providing a sustainable source of local seafood and meeting the state’s nutritional needs and procurement goals.

**CBF urges the Committee’s FAVORABLE report on HB 63.**

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

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.