



Wes Moore, Governor
Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor
Josh Kurtz, Secretary
David Goshorn, Deputy Secretary

2/15/2024

BILL NUMBER: SJ 3 – First Reader

SHORT TITLE: Commercial Fishery Disaster Declaration Due to Invasive Species

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: SUPPORT

EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT'S POSITION

The Department submitted a request to the United States Department of Commerce for a fishery resource disaster in 2022 for its Commercial Multi-Species Fishery.

Unfortunately, the Department of Commerce denied this request under the Fishery Resource Disasters Improvement Act. They found that the state's request did not meet the requirement that a fishery experienced a sudden, unexpected, large decrease in fish stock biomass that resulted in a significant loss of access to the fishery resource. Maryland made a case that multiple fisheries were at risk of significant impacts by the colonization of blue catfish. However, declines in these fisheries have been occurring over the last decade. In addition, blue catfish began affecting the fishery more than 5 years ago, which is outside the timeframe of an allowable cause. Further, the fisheries experienced a 24 percent commercial revenue loss as compared to their previous five-year average, which does not meet the 35 percent revenue loss threshold required by MSA Section 312(a) for a fishery to be eligible for a fishery resource disaster determination. Further, the opportunity for the loss of revenue in native Bay fisheries to be mitigated by the growing fishery for blue catfish added further complexity to the case. While the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) recognized the threat that invasive species pose to the Bay ecosystem and to the fisheries it supports, the law does not support a request for disaster relief due to invasives.

The Department currently has a program which provides grants of up to \$5,000 for invasive fish control. The grant program seeks to support effective ways to remove invasive fish, particularly blue catfish and Northern snakeheads, from Maryland waters and identify sustained beneficial uses of caught fish.

The Department is currently actively seeking out federal funding opportunities to assist with invasive species issues. Each year through its Aquatic Nuisance Species Management Plan, the Department receives federal funding that is used for a wide variety of invasive species programs.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

No similar bills have been proposed previously.

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BILL EXPLANATION

The bill asks the Governor and Department to seek commercial fishery emergency federal disaster declaration due to invasive species as well as any additional federal funding to protect and rehabilitate the State's commercial fisheries due to invasive species.