



Testimony in SUPPORT of SJ0003 – Commercial Fishery Disaster Declaration Due to Invasive Species

February 16, 2024

Dear Chairman Feldman and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in **SUPPORT of SJ0003** on behalf of ShoreRivers. ShoreRivers is a river protection group on Maryland's Eastern Shore with more than 2,500 members. Our mission is to protect and restore our Eastern Shore waterways through science-based advocacy, restoration, and education.

This bill supports the governor's request to the U.S. Secretary of Commerce for a federal commercial fishery disaster declaration. This would increase federal funding opportunities to support Maryland's commercial fisheries and the damages they have faced due from invasive fish species such as blue catfish and snakehead. This funding will incentivize the catch and use of invasive species, which wreak ecological and economic devastation on our Chesapeake ecosystem. These invasive species threaten native fish populations—they are aggressive, adapt to a variety of water conditions, and can outcompete native fish for food and resources. They have proliferated throughout the Bay watershed due to these aggressive tendencies, and while recreational fishermen do catch some, it is really our commercial watermen who make the largest impact in reducing the population of these invasive species. These invasive species pose a major risk to commercial fisheries throughout the Bay, and particularly on the Eastern Shore where many of our commercial watermen operate.

Many critical Chesapeake species such as blue crabs, eels, striped bass, and yellow and white perch, are struggling due to the prevalence of these invasive species, which significantly reduces the success and viability of our commercial fisheries. The more these harmful fish species are removed from our local waterways, the healthier our aquatic ecosystems and local economies will be. **The declaration of a commercial fishery disaster will support Maryland's commitment to improving the health of Chesapeake Bay and supporting the local community that depends on clean water and thriving native ecosystems.** By supporting Governor Moore's request to the U.S. Secretary of Commerce for a commercial fishery disaster declaration, this bill presents a unified front between the legislature and executive branch, with broad bipartisan support, in order to support Maryland's commercial watermen and the health of the Chesapeake Bay.

For the reasons stated above, ShoreRivers urges the Committee to adopt a **FAVORABLE** report on SJ0003.

Sincerely,

Zack Kelleher,
Sassafras Riverkeeper, on behalf of ShoreRivers

ShoreRivers

Isabel Hardesty, Executive Director
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