



Date: March 4, 2025

Bill: SB 960 – Natural Resources – Blue Catfish – Population Control

Position: Information

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee:

Saving wildlife and habitats is one of the National Aquarium's three overarching conservation goals. We are concerned about invasive blue catfish and its harmful impacts to native species in the Chesapeake Bay, and we recognize the importance of their commercial harvest as well as the need to address processing barriers exacerbated by the federal food inspection process. As you review this emergency legislation, we ask that you consider the potential of these proposed changes to increase fishery bycatch by expanding trotline length and number of allowable hooks and removing the requirement to use corrodible hooks.

Trotlines are non-selective gear that can catch any animal that encounters a baited hook, including native fish, seabirds, sea turtles and marine mammals. The National Aquarium has for more than three decades served as the lead responder for live stranded marine mammals and sea turtles along Maryland's 3,190 miles of coastline. We work year-round with the Department of Natural Resources and other partners throughout the Chesapeake region and beyond to conduct stranding response and rehabilitation activities including animal rescue and transport operations, monitoring, specialized veterinary care, releases and more. To date the National Aquarium has responded to more than 1,400 stranding or sighting reports and has successfully rehabilitated and released more than 400 animals. Changes to fishing regulations must incorporate consideration for potential impact on sea turtle or marine mammal strandings.

Furthermore, it is unlikely that the changes proposed to fishing regulations will improve processing barriers to and markets for blue catfish. Maryland should continue to address invasive blue catfish through implementation of its Fishery Management Plan for Tidewater Catfish and informed by the state's Invasive Catfish Advisory Committee and the Chesapeake Bay Program Invasive Catfish Workgroup.

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