

SB0960_DNR_SUP_EEE_3-4-25.pdf

Uploaded by: Emily Wilson

Position: FAV



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

March 4, 2025

BILL NUMBER: Senate Bill 960 – First Reader

SHORT TITLE: Natural Resources – Blue Catfish – Population Control

DEPARTMENT’S POSITION: SUPPORT

EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT’S POSITION

The Department supports and actively engages in controlling the distribution and impacts of invasive species. Within guidance of the state’s Aquatic Nuisance Species plan and the Fishery Management Plan for Tidewater Catfish, it has and will continue to support harvest by commercial and recreational means as a way of reducing biomass of invasive blue catfish.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Commercial landings for blue catfish lessens during July and August owed to poorer catchability of the fish using some commercial gears, as well as a reduced number of commercial harvesters in the fishery during that time. While fish processors supplement orders using frozen catfish during this time, it would be advantageous for biomass control to exert additional harvest and increase catfish removals during these months using a responsible approach.

The department has a catfish fishery management plan that includes invasive catfish. That enables the department to create pilot programs. There is currently a finfish trotline pilot program accepting applications for harvesting in areas currently prohibited. The logistics of these pilot programs are crafted by the agency’s biologists and species managers in coordination with the Invasive Catfish Advisory Committee, which is composed of members from commercial, recreational and other sectors of the invasive catfish fishery. The committee has been focused on working with the agency to develop a pilot project enabling trotlines in currently prohibited areas and allowing commercial sale of blue catfish harvested during charter trips, which is also currently prohibited.

The department currently permits electrofishing for scientific sampling of fishes and permittees are required in many cases to alert the department to days when sampling occurs. User conflicts can and do occur during the course of electrofishing, particularly when constituents fish areas where they see electrofishing is or has recently occurred. Additionally, there are safety issues relating to the use of electrofishing. Department staff are required through Standard Operating Procedures to take safety courses provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. For scientific collection, permittees are required to obtain training in order to use electrofishing.

Contact: Emily Wilson, Acting Director, Legislative and Constituent Services
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As for the changes to finfish trotlines, the agency does not have any rules prohibiting non-corrodible hooks for finfish trotlines or the number of hooks on a trotline. So those are allowed currently. There is also no limit on the maximum number of finfish trotlines a person may use. There is a 1200 feet length maximum, so the bill would double the length of the line. This may create user conflicts in some areas. The Invasive Catfish Advisory Committee voted in 2024 to maintain the current 1200 feet length maximum for finfish trotlines.

BILL EXPLANATION

The bill would require the Department to create a blue catfish electrofishing pilot program. It also allows the use of finfish trotlines up to 2400 feet in length, unlimited numbers of hooks, and use of non-corrodible hooks. It requires the Department of Agriculture to create a report by September 1, 2025.

SB 960

Uploaded by: Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio

Position: FAV



Talbot Watermen Association, Inc.

P.O. Box 324 • Bozman, MD 21612 • (410) 745-9759 • info@talbotwatermen.org

March 6, 2025

The Honorable Brian Feldman
Chair, Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
The Honorable Cheryl Kagan
Vice Chair, Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee,

We are writing to express our **support** for **Senate Bill 960/ House Bill 506 Natural Resources - Blue Catfish - Population Control**.

SB960/HB506 establishes an electrofishing pilot program and authorizes the use of finfish trotlines for harvesting blue catfish. Blue Catfish are invasive species that are posing a significant threat to both Chesapeake Bay restoration efforts and the commercial fishing industry. With the ability to live for more than 20 years and grow to over 100 pounds, they are preying on some of the Bay's most important species. With few natural predators, increasing commercial harvest is one of the most effective management tools Maryland can deploy. SB960/HB506 will expand harvest opportunities and help protect our native species.

We thank you in advance for your consideration and respectfully request a favorable report.

Sincerely,

Herman Jeffrey Harrison
President

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SB 960 - CBF - UNF.pdf

Uploaded by: Allison Colden

Position: UNF



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

*Environmental Protection and Restoration
Environmental Education*

Senate Bill 960 Natural Resources – Blue Catfish – Population Control

Date: March 4, 2025	Position: UNFAVORABLE
To: Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee	From: Dr. Allison Colden, MD Executive Director

Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **OPPOSES** Senate Bill 960, an emergency bill which would greatly expand the length of gear, number of hooks, and types of gear allowed to commercially harvest blue catfish in Chesapeake Bay.

While CBF recognizes the imminent threat that blue catfish pose to Maryland's native species, SB 960 removes any protection for native fish, sharks, rays, and sea turtles. Trotlines are non-selective gear, meaning that they will catch any animal that comes across the baited hook. By increasing the allowable trotline length and removing the limit on the number of hooks, this bill could increase the likelihood of interactions with protected or endangered species. This is particularly concerning for air-breathing animals, like sea turtles, which could drown and die while hooked on a trotline. Removing the requirement to use corrodible hooks furthers this concern as any gear that is lost or discarded can continue to ensnare and kill animals for years to come.

Similarly, electrofishing is only effective in non-tidal waters. These are areas where catfish overlap with important spawning areas for striped bass, perch, and other species. The impacts of repeated electric shocks to non-targeted fish are not well known and further data is required to determine the appropriate safeguards that would allow this type of gear to be used with minimal impacts to native species.

The impact of invasive blue catfish is one of the Bay's most pressing natural resources issues. However, current gear types and limits have allowed for a 287% increase in catfish harvest between 2012 and 2022. Processing and marketing blue catfish is the current bottleneck, which this bill would only exacerbate to the potential detriment of native species through bycatch and discard mortality.

CBF urges the Committee's UNFAVORABLE report on SB 960.

For more information, please contact Matt Stegman, Maryland Staff Attorney, at 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 200,000 members and e-subscribers, including 71,000 in Maryland alone, CBF works to educate the public and to protect the interest of the Chesapeake and its resources.

SB 960 - National Aquarium - Information.pdf

Uploaded by: Maggie Ostdahl

Position: INFO



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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