



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of HB446 – Flathead Catfish Trotline License – Prohibited Regulations

January 29, 2025

Chair Korman and Members of the esteemed E&T Committee:

I am here today to introduce House Bill 446, which would allow holders of commercial finfish trotline licenses for blue and flathead catfish to fish south of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge.

For some background, both the blue catfish and flathead catfish are invasive species which pose a substantial threat to our state's ecosystem. Currently, there are no geographic restrictions on the recreational licenses for Blue and Flathead Catfish and no restrictions on the number which can be caught in a given day recreationally, highlighting the Department of Natural Resources view of the importance of removing this invasive species from our waterways.

As part of efforts to remove these nonnative species from our waterways, two years ago, legislation was passed to reinstate the Commercial Finfish Trotline License for Blue and Flathead Catfish, which had been allowed to sunset. However, under present regulations that have been adopted by the Department, trotlines cannot be used in the Chesapeake Bay south of the Bay Bridge. Running a trotline is regarded as one of the most effective and efficient means to catch these catfish at scale, and according to DNR they make for great table fare, becoming increasingly popular for charter expeditions.

For those unfamiliar, running a trotline entails taking out a length of rope, attaching two floats at each end, and tying bait at intervals along the rope. You then idle along the length of the rope and pull your meal aboard with a net. This is a timeless method, originating from before the advent of motor vessels, where the lines would be run in shallow water and an individual on horseback would **trot** along the **line** with net in hand. Trotlines remain the preferred method for commercial crabbing to this day. A similar trotline tradition exists in the Mississippi river basin, where the Blue and Flathead Catfish originated from, and the trotline also happens to be their preferred method as well.

While there is a large population of these catfish north of the bay bridge, their population has been increasing in the tidal Potomac and Patuxent, as well as in other regions south of the Bay Bridge. The holders of these licenses are a critical part of the efforts to remove these harmful species of fish from our waterways. I do not believe that the current restrictions are consistent with the goal of getting as many of these fish out of our waterways as possible. It is important to note that this bill does not change anything else in the statute creating the license or of any other part of State law. It does not relieve the license holders of their obligation to only catch blue and flathead catfish; this bill simply removes the restrictions on where these catfish can be caught. With this in mind, I respectfully request a favorable report on House Bill 446.