



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

*Environmental Protection and Restoration
Environmental Education*

House Bill 1249 Natural Resources – Blue Catfish – Population Control

Date: February 28, 2025	Position: UNFAVORABLE
To: Environment & Transportation Committee	From: Allison Colden MD Executive Director

Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **OPPOSES** House Bill 1249, 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, HB 1249 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 HB 1249.

For more information, please contact Matt Stegman, Maryland Staff Attorney, at mstegman@cbf.org.

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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.