

# **HB947 SB610 Commercial Blue and Flathead Catfish F**

Uploaded by: Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio

Position: FAV



**Talbot Watermen Association, Inc.**

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

February 24, 2026

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

The Honorable Marc Korman  
Chair, Environment & Transportation Committee  
251 Taylor House Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chair Feldman, Chair Korman, and Members of the Committee,

We are writing to express our **support** for **House Bill 947/Senate Bill 610 - Department of Natural Resources - Commercial Blue and Flathead Catfish Finfish Trotline License - Alterations.**

Blue Catfish and Flathead Catfish are invasive species that pose 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. House Bill 947/Senate Bill 610 will expand harvest opportunities and help protect our native species.

We thank you in advance for your consideration and respectfully request a favorable report for House Bill 947/Senate Bill 610.

Sincerely,

Herman Jeffrey Harrison  
President

Contact:

Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio  
R&R Solutions, LLC  
(443) 786-2137

[jeannie@randrsolutions.us](mailto:jeannie@randrsolutions.us)

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**SB0610\_DNR\_SWA\_EEE\_3-10-26.pdf**

Uploaded by: Lydia McPherson

Position: FWA



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

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March 10, 2026

**BILL NUMBER: SENATE BILL 610 - FIRST READER**

**SHORT TITLE: DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES – COMMERCIAL BLUE AND FLATHEAD CATFISH FINFISH TROTLINE LICENSE – ALTERATIONS**

**DEPARTMENT’S POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS**

### **EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT’S POSITION**

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The Department supports SB 610 with an amendment. The bill, as written, could have significant unintended consequences to unwanted bycatch, including striped bass. Additionally, the Blue and Flathead Catfish Finfish Trotline License is an unlimited \$15 license. This would open up a commercial harvest gear type with high bycatch mortality to an unlimited number of individuals who pay a significantly smaller amount for their license than a tidal fish licensee.

Recently, the agency’s Invasive Catfish Advisory Committee made recommendations to the agency about gill net use and based on those recommendations, the agency has moved forward with creating a pilot program for next year that would seek to obtain more information from gill net users and areas where there is high bycatch with sensitive species versus areas with a high volume of invasive catfish.

The agency would support the bill with an amendment to remove the current gill net allowance under the \$15 license, add the pilot that is currently being created to the existing list of pilot programs for invasive catfish, and extend the existing sunset of the law until 2030 to accommodate the timeframe to complete a pilot program.

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

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Under current law, only tidal fish licensees with finfish harvester licenses or unlimited tidal fish licenses are currently allowed to use gill nets, and only a subgroup of those licensees have striped bass permits, which allow the use of 7-inch, stretch-mesh gill nets.

### **BILL EXPLANATION**

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The bill changes the current Blue and Flathead Catfish Finfish Trotline License to the Blue and Flathead Catfish License and allows licensees to harvest blue catfish with both a finfish trotline and a gill net with a mesh size of not more than 7 inches.

Contact: Lydia McPherson, Director, Legislative and Constituent Services  
[lydia.mcpherson1@maryland.gov](mailto:lydia.mcpherson1@maryland.gov) ♦ 410-260-8113 (office) ♦ 443-875-7785 (cell)

BY:

(To be offered in the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee)

AMENDMENTS TO SENATE BILL 610  
(First Reading File Bill)

AMENDMENT NO. 1

On page 1, strike beginning with “**Commercial**” in line 2 down through “**License**” in line 3 and substitute “**Invasive Blue Catfish Pilot Program**”; strike beginning with “commercial” in line 4 down through “license” in line 6 and substitute “Invasive Blue Catfish Pilot Program to add the blue catfish gill net program; and generally relating to the Invasive Blue Catfish Pilot Program”; strike in their entirety lines 8 through 11, inclusive, and substitute:

“Chapter 172 of the Acts of the General Assembly of 2025  
Sections 1 and 2”;

and in line 13, strike “the Laws of Maryland read as follows”.

AMENDMENT NO. 2

On pages 1 through 2, strike in their entirety the lines beginning with line 14 on page 1 through line 15 on page 2.

On page 2, after line 15, insert:

“(a) The Department of Natural Resources, in coordination with the Invasive Catfish Advisory Committee, shall establish the Invasive Blue Catfish Pilot Program.

(b) The purpose of the Pilot Program is to curb the spread of the invasive blue catfish in the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries.

(c) The Pilot Program consists of:

(1) the For–Hire/Commercial Blue Catfish Program;

(2) the Mid– and Lower–Bay Blue Catfish Trotline Program; and

(3) any other program that the Department determines to be effective in curbing the spread of blue catfish in the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries; AND

(4) THE BLUE CATFISH GILL NET PROGRAM.

(d) (1) Under the For–Hire/Commercial Blue Catfish Program, the Department may:

(i) authorize eligible participants to run for–hire and commercial fishing trips simultaneously; and

(ii) make any regulatory or administrative changes it believes will increase the commercial harvest of blue catfish.

(2) (i) Under the Mid- and Lower-Bay Blue Catfish Trotline Program, the Department shall authorize the use of finfish trotlines south of the William Preston Lane Jr. Memorial Bridge to the maximum extent feasible to harvest blue catfish.

(ii) The Department may restrict the areas south of the William Preston Lane Jr. Memorial Bridge where finfish trotlines may be used to harvest blue catfish based on potential bycatch, user conflicts, or other issues it considers relevant.

(e) In implementing the Pilot Program, the Department shall consider for the harvest of blue catfish:

(1) authorizing the use of electrofishing;

(2) authorizing the use of finfish trotlines of up to 2,400 feet in length;

(3) eliminating any limits on the number of hooks used on a finfish trotline; and

(4) authorizing the use of hooks that are not corrodible.

(f) The Department shall:

(1) expand the use of practices determined to be effective under the Pilot Program throughout the duration of the Pilot Program; and

(2) continue to implement and update the Pilot Program until the termination date of this Act.

(g) [On or before December 1, 2025, the Department shall report to the Governor and, in accordance with § 2-1257 of the State Government Article, the General Assembly on its findings and recommendations under the Pilot Program.] **ON OR BEFORE DECEMBER 1 OF EACH YEAR, THE DEPARTMENT SHALL SUBMIT A REPORT TO THE SENATE EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE AND THE HOUSE ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE, IN ACCORDANCE WITH § 2-1257 OF THE STATE GOVERNMENT ARTICLE, ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE PILOT PROGRAM DURING THE PRECEDING YEAR, INCLUDING FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS UNDER THE PILOT PROGRAM.**

SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act is an emergency measure, is necessary for the immediate preservation of the public health or safety, has been passed by a yea and nay vote supported by three-fifths of all the members elected to each of the two Houses of the General Assembly, and shall take effect from the date it is enacted. It shall remain effective through June 30, [2026] 2030, and, at the end of June 30, [2026] 2030, this Act, with no further action required by the General Assembly, shall be abrogated and of no further force and effect.”.

**SB 0610 favorable w amend.pdf**

Uploaded by: Sean Beck

Position: FWA

## **SB 0610 (2026) Favorable with Amendments**

**Sean Beck**

Blue catfish are well-established as a nuisance invasive species in the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. Their effects on blue crabs, oysters, menhaden, and other aquatic species are incredibly detrimental to the populations of those critical species. Our state should employ every option available to remove these fishes from our waterways.

As previously testified by local watermen in the House, increasing the mesh size for gill nets in use for harvesting blue catfish will make this methodology much more effective. We should enable our watermen with the tools they need to manage this population with the ultimate goal of total eradication.

Despite my position listed thus far, it was worth noting that gill nets do not discriminate between species of similar size, and a mesh size of 7" is capable of unintentionally catching the iconic striped bass of spawning size. I ask that the bill be amended under consultation with MD DNR to prohibit the use of these gill nets during the seasons and in the waterways used by the migratory spawning class of striped bass in the Chesapeake and its tributaries. Prohibiting the use of large mesh gill nets during the spawning season for stripers will help protect the spawning class of stripers while also empowering watermen to harvest the invasive blue catfish the rest of the year.

I ask for a favorable report on this bill with an amendment as previously described.

**SB 610 - CBF - UNF.pdf**

Uploaded by: Allison Colden

Position: UNF



# CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

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## Senate Bill 610

### Department of Natural Resources – Commercial Blue and Flathead Catfish Finfish Trotline License – Alterations

**Date:** March 10, 2026

**To:** Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

**Position:** UNFAVORABLE

**From:** Dr. Allison Colden,  
MD Executive Director

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The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **OPPOSES Senate Bill 610** which expands the scope of the existing finfish trotline license for blue and flathead catfish to allow licensees to use gill nets with mesh sizes up to 7 inches.

Blue catfish were first introduced in the 1970s and 1980s in Virginia to develop a recreational fishery. Since then, these highly invasive fish have rapidly expanded their range into nearly every Chesapeake Bay tributary. Blue catfish are voracious generalist predators that feed on native species such as menhaden, striped bass, eel, shad, river herring, and blue crabs. In areas where blue catfish populations have been established, catfish make up approximately 75% of the total fish weight of all fish inhabiting the river.

CBF has long supported regulations that would facilitate the commercial harvest and removal of blue catfish to minimize its negative effects, including the creation of the special commercial trotline license that is the subject of SB 610. However, gill nets are a non-specific fishing gear, meaning the nets can capture and kill any species that encounter them, not just catfish. Given the likelihood of interactions with other commercial species (e.g. striped bass, white perch) and federally endangered species (e.g. Atlantic sturgeon), expanding the use of gill nets should be considered carefully.

For example, Maryland's iconic striped bass fishery is currently under significant stress due to six consecutive years of reproductive failure. Since striped bass spend most of their early life in Chesapeake Bay waters, protecting these resident fish so they may grow to a mature, reproductive size is critical. Because of these concerns, commercial striped bass gill nets are limited to a mesh size of 5 to 7 inches to avoid catching under- and oversized striped bass to minimize the number of fish discarded from the net. SB 610 has no such protection, allowing gill nets up to 7 inches, which could include bycatch of striped bass larger than 31 inches. This is of particular concern because 31 inches is the expected size of the 2015 year class of striped bass – the last strong year class currently contributing most to spawning. Allowing the proliferation of non-selective gear with small mesh size to an additional approximately 400 trotline license holders annually could significantly jeopardize striped bass recovery.

Before expanding the gear types used to target catfish, more attention must be paid to the barriers to catfish processing and distribution that limit the market for Maryland's invasive catfish. Without markets and infrastructure to sell catfish into, actions that increase catfish harvest will only serve to drive down the price per pound of catfish and further disincentivize harvesters from targeting them over other high-value species.

**CBF urges the Committee's UNFAVORABLE report on SB 610.**

For more information, please contact Matt Stegman, Maryland Staff Attorney, at [mstegman@cbf.org](mailto:mstegman@cbf.org).

Maryland Office • Philip Merrill Environmental Center • 6 Herndon Avenue • Annapolis • Maryland • 21403

# **SB610\_Fish\_Boat\_LtrFINAL.pdf**

Uploaded by: David Sikorski

Position: UNF

3/10/2026

**SB 610 Department of Natural Resources – Commercial Blue and Flathead Catfish Finfish Trotline License – Alterations**

Honorable Members of the Senate EEE Committee,

On behalf of the undersigned recreational fishing, boating, and conservation organizations representing Maryland anglers, charter operators, businesses, and coastal communities, we write to express our **opposition to Senate Bill 610**.

While we share the goal of addressing invasive blue catfish in the Chesapeake Bay, SB 610 is not a workable solution. As written, the bill would authorize the widespread use of gillnets in Maryland’s tidal waters without the regulatory framework, environmental safeguards, or commercial infrastructure necessary to support such a program.

Gillnets are an inherently indiscriminate gear and deploying them at this scale in Chesapeake Bay waters raises serious concerns about bycatch impacts on striped bass, white perch, and many other important species, including endangered sturgeon and protected marine mammals and turtles. SB 610 includes no meaningful safeguards to address these concerns. The bill contains no bycatch limits, no reporting requirements, no monitoring provisions, and no defined mortality thresholds for non-target species.

Furthermore, this legislation pre-empts the ongoing Invasive Catfish Advisory Committee, a 17-member stakeholder committee committed to working in partnership to advise the Maryland Department of Natural Resources on appropriate management actions regarding invasive catfish.

While recent amendments on the House version of this bill describe the proposal as a “four-year pilot program,” the legislation still lacks critical program details. The amendments do not specify participation limits, geographic restrictions, seasonal parameters, or monitoring requirements. In effect, the bill authorizes a broad expansion of gillnetting without clearly defined objectives, performance metrics, or management safeguards.

We strongly support science-based efforts to reduce invasive blue catfish populations. However, effective management requires careful planning, regulatory clarity, and protections for native species and existing fisheries. SB 610 does not provide those elements.

**For these reasons, we respectfully urge the Committee to reject SB 610 in its current form and instead work with stakeholders and resource managers to develop a comprehensive and responsible strategy for addressing invasive blue catfish in the Chesapeake Bay.**

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

**David Sikorski**  
Coastal Conservation Association  
Maryland

**Mike Waine**  
American Sportfishing Association

**Lenny Rudow**  
Fishtalk Magazine

**Chad Tocowicz, Govt. Relations  
Manager**  
Marine Retailers Association of the  
Americas

**John Stefancik, Executive Director**  
Marine Trades Assoc. Maryland