

SB 916 - CBF - FAV.pdf

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CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

Senate Bill 916 Workgroup on Seafood Marketing

Date: March 10, 2026

To: Education, Energy, & the Environment Committee

Position: **FAVORABLE**

From: Allison Colden, Ph.D.,
MD Executive Director

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **SUPPORTS Senate Bill 916** which establishes a joint Maryland Department of Agriculture–Department of Natural Resources seafood marketing workgroup to identify challenges and opportunities in seafood marketing in the State. The workgroup is required to produce a report outlining their findings and recommendations to the General Assembly no later than December 1, 2026.

Maryland’s seafood industry is a defining part of our heritage, our economy, and our connection to Chesapeake Bay. Yet several Maryland-harvested species are significantly constrained by limited or inconsistent marketing. This bill would bring together the expertise of MDA and DNR with the perspectives of harvesters, processors, restaurants, and conservation partners to evaluate market barriers and identify strategic opportunities that strengthen working waterfronts and the Bay.

One of the most urgent needs is expanding the market for invasive blue catfish. This species is now abundant throughout Maryland’s tidal rivers and has well-documented impacts on native fish, crabs, and ecosystem health. While demand for blue catfish is growing, it is still limited by inconsistent marketing, variable consumer awareness, and underdeveloped distribution channels. A coordinated marketing strategy would help increase public recognition of blue catfish as a sustainable seafood option, drive stable demand to support commercial harvest, and reduce predation pressure on native species. Blue catfish represents a rare opportunity wherein promoting a seafood product and tapping into new market segments directly supports Bay restoration.

By establishing a structured workgroup with participation from both MDA and DNR, SB 916 has the potential to identify market gaps and develop coordinated approaches to broadening recognition of Maryland seafood. By positioning Maryland seafood as a high-value product and increasing price-per-pound, marketing can help support watermen and processors’ bottom lines while promoting sustainability and protecting Maryland’s natural resources.

If passed, CBF looks forward to reviewing the recommendations of the workgroup and helping to implement solutions that serve the Bay and Maryland’s seafood industry.

CBF urges the Committee’s FAVORABLE report on SB 916.

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.

SB916 MDA LOS.pdf

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Maryland Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary

Wes Moore, Governor

Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor

Kevin Atticks, Secretary

Steven A. Connelly, Deputy Secretary

Agriculture | Maryland's Leading
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Maryland Department of Agriculture

Legislative Comment

Date: March 10th, 2026

BILL NUMBER: SB 916
BILL TITLE: Workgroup on Seafood Marketing
MDA POSITION: SUPPORT

The Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) respectfully submits this letter in support of *Senate Bill 916 - Workgroup on Seafood Marketing*, which examines the challenges and opportunities in the State of Maryland related to seafood marketing, with a final report due to the Governor and certain committees of the General Assembly on recommendations and findings of the workgroup.

The Seafood Marketing Program, housed within the Maryland Department of Agriculture's Marketing and Agricultural Development Section, works in tandem with the Governor-appointed Seafood Marketing Advisory Commission to promote local products and strengthen market access across retail, restaurant, and institutional sectors. Responsible for an industry that contributes an estimated \$600 million annually to the state's economy, the program fosters a sustainable seafood sector by raising public awareness and highlighting the economic importance of Maryland's harvesters and processors. These vital promotional and marketing efforts are uniquely supported by the Seafood Marketing Fund, which consists of surcharges on commercial watermen and seafood dealer licenses collected by the Department of Natural Resources and deposited at MDA. This collaborative framework ensures that high-quality, Maryland-caught and grown products remain competitive while supporting statewide employment and economic development.

SB 916 provides a worthwhile review of the Maryland seafood industry by examining its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges. This evaluation will help ensure the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of the industry. MDA supports SB 916 as a practical and collaborative step toward strengthening the marketing of Maryland seafood, and respectfully requests a favorable report.

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

March 10, 2026

BILL NUMBER: **SENATE BILL 916 - FIRST READER**

SHORT TITLE: **WORKGROUP ON SEAFOOD MARKETING**

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: **SUPPORT**

EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT'S POSITION

The Department supports Senate Bill 916. The agency actively participates in the Seafood and Aquaculture Products Marketing Commission and believes creating and sustaining markets for the seafood harvested by the state's commercial fisheries is an important part of fisheries management. The Department welcomes any additional conversations related to promoting the state's seafood products.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Under Agriculture Article, Section 10-1101, the state also has a Seafood and Aquaculture Products Marketing Commission whose purpose is to assist the Seafood and Aquaculture Marketing Program with promoting increased consumption and distribution of Maryland seafood and to seek efficient methods to reduce cost and improve the quality and marketability of Maryland seafood. The program is funded by the seafood marketing surcharge under Natural Resources Article, Section 4-701.

BILL EXPLANATION

The bill creates a workgroup on seafood marketing convened by the secretaries of the Departments of Agriculture and Natural Resources to examine challenges and opportunities in seafood marketing. The bill also requires a report on the findings of this workgroup.

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UMCES 916 Support Amendment.pdf

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Position: FWA



University of Maryland
CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE

SENATE EDUCATION, ENERGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
Senate Bill 916
Workgroup on Seafood Marketing
March 10, 2026
Favorable with Amendment

Chair Feldman and Vice Chair Kagan and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on Senate Bill 916. The bill requires the Secretary of Agriculture and the Secretary of Natural Resources to jointly convene a workgroup to examine challenges and opportunities in the State related to seafood marketing.

The University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science (UMCES) is one of twelve institutions within the University System of Maryland. UMCES has multiple environmental research laboratories across the State and administers the Maryland Sea Grant College. A core mission of UMCES is to provide the science for decision-making for the betterment of Maryland's environment and her citizens related to Chesapeake Bay and beyond. UMCES has four research laboratories across the State as well as the Integration and Application Network and administers Maryland Sea Grant.

UMCES supports the establishment of the Workgroup on Seafood Marketing and offers a friendly amendment regarding the make-up of the Workgroup. UMCES has particular expertise in fisheries science, aquaculture, and seafood industry. Therefore, we respectfully recommend inclusion of the following amendment under SECTION 1:

- “the President of the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science or the President’s designee”

UMCES appreciates your leadership in strengthening Maryland's seafood industry and welcomes continued dialogue on this important issue. UMCES recommends a Favorable Report and asks that its friendly amendment be considered.