

HB947 SB610 Commercial Blue and Flathead Catfish F

Uploaded by: Jeannie Riccio

Position: FAV



Talbot Watermen Association, Inc.

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

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SB0610_DNR_SUP_ENT_4-1-26.pdf

Uploaded by: Lydia McPherson

Position: FAV



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

April 1, 2026

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

SHORT TITLE: **DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES – INVASIVE BLUE CATFISH PILOT PROGRAM – ALTERATIONS**

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: **SUPPORT**

EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT'S POSITION

The Department supports SB 610 as amended. The bill would require the department to establish a Blue Catfish Gill Net Pilot project as part of the invasive catfish pilot project program that it has created in consultation with the Invasive Catfish Advisory Committee (ICAC). The bill also requires the agency to report out on the program annually and extends the pilot provisions until 2030 to accommodate the timeframe of the pilot project program.

The ICAC made recommendations to the agency about gill net use, and based on those recommendations, the agency has moved forward with creating a pilot project 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 bill, as amended, aligns with the work the agency is currently doing.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Under current law, only tidal fish licensees with unlimited 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 5- to 7-inch, stretch-mesh gill nets.

BILL EXPLANATION

The bill as amended creates a pilot project to examine gill net use for harvesting blue catfish, while also documenting by-catch during the winter gillnet fishery.

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

SB610.FAVORABLE.ShoreRivers.pdf

Uploaded by: Zack Kelleher

Position: FAV



Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 610 – Natural Resources -Commercial Blue and Flathead Catfish Finfish Trotline License - Alterations

April 1, 2026

Dear Chairman Korman,

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in **SUPPORT** of **SB610** on behalf of ShoreRivers. ShoreRivers is a river protection organization on Maryland's Eastern Shore with more than 2,000 members. *Our mission is to protect Maryland's Eastern Shore waterways through science-based advocacy, restoration, education, and engagement.*

This legislation **alters the commercial blue and flathead catfish finfish trotline license to allow a person to use a gill net with a mesh size of not more than 7 inches.** These regulations will improve the fisheries for these invasive species, which wreak ecological and economic devastation on our Chesapeake ecosystem. Blue and channel catfish threaten native fish populations—they are aggressive, adapt to a variety of water conditions, and can outcompete native fish for food and resources. They have proliferated throughout the Bay watershed due to these aggressive tendencies, and while recreational fishermen do catch some, it is really our commercial watermen who make the largest impact in reducing the population of these invasive species. These invasive species pose a major risk to commercial fisheries throughout the Bay, and particularly on the Eastern Shore where many of our commercial watermen operate.

Many critical Chesapeake species such as blue crabs, eels, striped bass, and white perch are struggling due to the prevalence of these catfish, which significantly reduces the success and viability of our commercial fisheries. The more these harmful fish species are removed from our local waterways, the healthier our aquatic ecosystems and local economies will be. **Removing as many invasive blue and channel catfish as possible will support Maryland's commitment to improving the health of Chesapeake Bay and supporting the local community that depends on clean water and thriving native ecosystems.** Improving regulations to the fishery will help drive the demand for more of these harmful invasive fish to be caught and consumed.

For these reasons, ShoreRivers **urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 610** and encourages the legislature to support policies that invest in watershed health and resilient natural systems across Maryland.

Sincerely,
Zack Kelleher, Sassafras Riverkeeper on behalf of:

ShoreRivers

Scott Budden, Executive Director

Annie Richards, Chester Riverkeeper | Matt Pluta, Choptank Riverkeeper

Ben Ford, Miles Wye Riverkeeper | Zack Kelleher, Sassafras Riverkeeper

SB610 Amendment Blue Cat Fish.pdf

Uploaded by: Johnny Mautz

Position: FWA



SB0610/443225/1

AMENDMENTS
PREPARED
BY THE
DEPT. OF LEGISLATIVE
SERVICES

26 FEB 26
15:21:57

BY: Senator Mautz
(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, in line 2, strike “**Department of**”; in the same line, strike “**Commercial**” and substitute “**Invasive**”; in the same line, strike “**and Flathead**”; in line 3, strike “**Finfish Trotline License**” and substitute “**Pilot Program**”; strike beginning with “commercial” in line 4 down through “gear” in line 5 and substitute “**Invasive Blue Catfish Pilot Program to include the Blue Catfish Gill Net Program**”; in line 6, strike “commercial blue and flathead catfish finfish trotline license” and substitute “**Invasive Blue Catfish Pilot Program**”; strike line 8 in its entirety and substitute “**Chapter 171 of the Acts of the General Assembly of 2025**”; strike in their entirety lines 9 through 11, inclusive; and after line 11, insert:

“BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,
Chapter 172 of the Acts of the General Assembly of 2025”.

AMENDMENT NO. 2

On page 1, after line 13, insert:

“Chapter 171 of the Acts of 2025

SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF
MARYLAND, That:

(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) THE BLUE CATFISH GILL NET PROGRAM; AND

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

(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] 2026, AND EACH DECEMBER 1 THEREAFTER, the Department shall report to the [Governor] SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT and THE HOUSE ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE, in accordance with § 2-1257 of the State Government Article, [the General Assembly] on [its] THE ACTIVITIES OF THE PILOT PROGRAM DURING THE IMMEDIATELY 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.

Chapter 172 of the Acts of 2025

SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND, That:

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

SB610 REPRINT.pdf

Uploaded by: Johnny Mautz

Position: FWA

SENATE BILL 610

EMERGENCY BILL

M2

6lr3358
CF HB 947

By: **Senator Mautz**

Introduced and read first time: February 5, 2026

Assigned to: Education, Energy, and the Environment

A BILL ENTITLED

1 AN ACT concerning

2 ~~Department of Natural Resources – Commercial Invasive Blue and Flathead Catfish~~
3 ~~Finfish Trotline License Pilot Program – Alterations~~

4 FOR the purpose of altering the ~~commercial blue and flathead catfish finfish trotline license~~
5 ~~to allow a person to catch blue catfish with certain gear~~ Invasive Blue Catfish Pilot
6 Program to include the Blue Catfish Gill Net Program; and generally relating to
the ~~commercial blue and flathead catfish finfish trotline license~~ Invasive Blue Catfish
Pilot Program.

7 BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,
8 ~~Article – Natural Resources~~ Chapter 171 of the Acts of the General Assembly of 2025
9 ~~Section 4-701.2~~
10 ~~Annotated Code of Maryland~~
11 ~~(2023 Replacement Volume and 2025 Supplement)~~

BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,
Chapter 172 of the Acts of the General Assembly of 2025

12 SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,
13 That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

Chapter 171 of the Acts of 2025

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Catfish Advisory Committee, shall establish the Invasive Blue Catfish Pilot Program.

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~~Article Natural Resources~~

14

15 ~~4-701.2~~

16 ~~(a) There is a commercial blue and flathead catfish [finfish trotline] license.~~

17 ~~(b) (1) The license authorizes the holder to catch for sale [blue and flathead]~~
18 ~~IN THE TIDAL WATERS OF THE STATE;~~

19 ~~(1) BLUE CATFISH USING, AS DEFINED IN DEPARTMENT~~
20 ~~REGULATIONS;~~

21 ~~1. A FINFISH TROTLINE; OR~~

2 REPRINT OF SENATE BILL 610 as amended by SB0610/443225/1 02/26/26 at 3:21 PM

1 ~~2. A GILL NET WITH A MESH SIZE OF NOT MORE THAN 7-~~
2 ~~INCHES; AND-~~

3 ~~(H) FLATHEAD catfish [in the tidal waters of the State] using a~~
4 ~~finfish trotline, as defined in Department regulations.~~

5 ~~(2) A licensee shall fish in accordance with Department regulations.~~

6 ~~(c) A person who wishes to obtain the license shall complete and submit an~~
7 ~~application for the license to the Department or any person designated by the Department.~~

8 ~~(d) An applicant for the license does not need to hold a tidal fish license under §~~
9 ~~4-701 of this subtitle to be eligible for the license.~~

10 ~~(e) The term of the license is 1 year from September 1 through August 31 the~~
11 ~~following year.~~

12 ~~(f) The annual license fee is \$15.~~

13 ~~(g) A licensee may not transfer a license issued under this section.~~

14 ~~(h) A licensee shall have a commercial blue and flathead catfish [finfish trotline]~~
15 ~~license in the licensee's possession when the licensee fishes under the license.~~

16 SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act is an emergency
17 measure, is necessary for the immediate preservation of the public health or safety, has
18 been passed by a ye and nay vote supported by three-fifths of all the members elected to
19 each of the two Houses of the General Assembly, and shall take effect from the date it is
20 enacted.

SB 610 - CBF - FWA - E&T.pdf

Uploaded by: Matt Stegman

Position: FWA

