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**RECREATIONAL ANGLERS
WORKING TO CONSERVE, PROMOTE, AND ENHANCE MARYLAND'S
MARINE RESOURCES**

March 3, 2021

To: Honorable Kumar P. Barve, Chairman
Honorable Dana Stein, Vice Chairman
Honorable Members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee

Re: House Bill 693 - Cecil County – Fishing - Restrictions

CCA Maryland Position: OPPOSE

House Bill 693 alters the notice and permission requirements for the setting of nets in certain Cecil County waters.

As Maryland's only state-wide recreational angling based conservation organization, CCA Maryland has major concerns with the known and unknown impacts of the expanded use of nets in Cecil County's rivers and tributaries to the Chesapeake Bay.

For more than two decades, CCA Maryland has worked with Maryland's Department of Natural Resources(DNR) to guide and shape policies that effect our state's many and valuable public natural resources.

Ideally, this important work is always guided by scientific information that helps answer questions about the impacts on the species in question and the trade-offs associated with any proposed change in natural resource policy.

An analysis of the sustainable use of a species and the many questions introduced by harvest or use of such species are often addressed in the development and use of fisheries management plan. Once written, these plans are commonly vetted by numerous advisory commissions to DNR in a public and transparent fashion.

Unfortunately, no such process has been initiated prior to the introduction of HB 693 to address the many questions related this wholesale change in the allowance of nets in Cecil County and the adjacent waterways and how to understand the potential impacts.

Species Impacts

Striped bass, river herring, American and hickory shad are some of the most important species that may be impacted by this action.

All of these species are anadromous in nature, meaning they return to spawn in the rivers from which they were born, and do so in the spring of the year. The tributaries of the upper Chesapeake Bay all include important spawning habitat for these species and more.

Striped bass, or rockfish, are currently listed as overfished meaning their adult spawning population is below levels which determine the sustainability of these important fish.

In 2020, Maryland DNR initiated a full closure of targeting of striped bass state-wide by recreational anglers in April to mitigate our impact on these fish when they are in certain areas and heading to spawn. Additional protections already exist in specific areas which prohibit impacting these fish while spawning, and have been in place since the early 1990's.

Striped bass may not be harvested commercially in Maryland when over 36", a noteworthy protection of the spawning stock. Unfortunately, these fish may still be caught by nets on their way to the spawning reaches and may undergo stressful handling that may exist when being handled and removed from nets.

River herring and both shad species are also protected from recreational and commercial harvest at this time, but have no protections from being caught by pound nets beyond required release when caught.

How will DNR ensure that additional nets in Cecil County will not impact these species in a meaningful way as they congregate to spawn?

How does the use of pound net gear impact endangered species? This image shows an endangered species, the Atlantic Sturgeon lifted by the tail by a Maryland pound net fisherman. **Do suitable regulations exist to ensure the safe release of species like this sturgeon?** Photo Credit: Hooper's Island Store Facebook.



Latent Effort:

CCA Maryland has long expressed concerns about the volume of permitted pound net sites which exist in the Chesapeake Bay.

While it is known that the majority of pound net sites are not currently fished and pound nets are notably expensive to install and manage, we believe that a full review of pound nets sites should be initiated by Maryland DNR, and use or lose provisions should be considered for future pound net permits.

A map of permitted sites and those which are active and inactive can be found here:

<https://dnr.maryland.gov/fisheries/Pages/poundnets/index.aspx>

Additional Concerns:

Whenever a long standing prohibition is considered, numerous questions exist related to the prohibition.

- **Why and when was this gear prohibited?**
- **What are the potential ecological impacts of a reversal of this prohibition?**
- **How will the use of this gear impact targeted and non-targeted species?**
- **Is there a specific desire to use this gear in a specific way, at a specific location, or at a specific time?**
- **Are there assumptions made previously about this gears impacts that may not be relevant to current conditions?**

Beyond these ecological questions, CCA Maryland has additional concerns related to the many user impacts that are likely to occur should this prohibition of netting be reversed.

Moving forward, CCA Maryland stands committed to participating in an inclusive and transparent process to define the trade-offs associated with the expanded use of nets in Cecil County and where other conflicts may exist or could exist due to such changes in fisheries policy.

For these reasons, we respectfully request a un-favorable vote on House Bill 693.

For more information, please contact David Sikorski, Executive Director @ david@ccamd.org or (443)621-9186