

SB 80_CBF_FAV.pdf

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CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

*Environmental Protection and Restoration
Environmental Education*

Senate Bill 80

Natural Resources – Blue and Flathead Catfish Finfish Trotline License – Establishment

Date: January 25, 2023

Position: Support

To: Senate Education, Energy & Environment Committee

From: Allison Colden, Sr. Fisheries Scientist

Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **SUPPORTS** SB 80 which would make permanent a fishing license for the commercial harvest of blue and flathead catfish by trotline in Chesapeake Bay.

Blue and flathead catfish were first introduced in the 1970s and 1980s in Virginia to develop a recreational fishery. Since then, these invasive fish have expanded their range into nearly every Chesapeake Bay tributary. The blue catfish's ability to tolerate varying salinities, temperatures, and habitat types make it easy for them to move throughout the Bay. This expansion is especially troublesome as 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 weight of all fish inhabiting the river. The Chesapeake Bay Program's Invasive Catfish Management Strategy, published in August 2020, identifies increased commercial fisheries harvest as a priority management strategy.

The commercial blue catfish trotline license was first established in 2019 with a sunset in June 2022. Currently, commercial trotline harvest of blue catfish is occurring under a pilot program established by Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) following the expiration of the license program. Making this program permanent will aid in the removal of these invasive predators through continued commercial harvest.

CBF urges the Committee's FAVORABLE report on SB 80.

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 300,000 members and e-subscribers, including over 109,000 in Maryland alone, CBF works to educate the public and to protect the interest of the Chesapeake and its resources.

SenatorBailey_FAV_SB80.pdf

Uploaded by: Jack Bailey

Position: FAV

JACK BAILEY
Legislative District 29
Calvert and St. Mary's Counties

Budget & Taxation Committee



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January 25, 2023

Senate Bill 80 – Natural Resources – Blue and Flathead Catfish Finfish Trotline License – Establishment

Dear Chairman Feldman and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to introduce Senate Bill 80 – Natural Resources – Blue and Flathead Catfish Finfish Trotline License – Establishment. This legislation restores provisions of law establishing a commercial blue and flathead catfish finfish trotline license in Maryland.

This license was initially created by an amendment that I sponsored to Senate Bill 7 in 2019. Since its establishment, I have heard from constituents who applied for and used the license to fish for these invasive species. However, during the interim, I heard from one constituent who had reapplied for this license and had been informed by the Department of Natural Resources that it was no longer being offered, because a subsequent amendment to my amendment added a sunset of June 30, 2022 for this license. DNR did not take the necessary action during the last legislative session to introduce legislation to make this program permanent. From my office's discussions with the Department at the time we were made aware of this issue, it appears that allowing these provisions to lapse was inadvertent.

Senate Bill 80 restores the provisions of this section exactly as they were prior to the sunset. Licenses such as the one in this bill are an important part of our State's strategy to fight against invasive species of catfish, and this legislation would ensure that this option continues to be available to Marylanders to assist us in these efforts. It is an emergency bill to ensure that DNR can resume issuing these licenses as soon as possible to reduce the effect that the sunset of the previous law has on our State's ability to reduce the population of blue and flathead catfish.

Senate Bill 7 of 2019, which included these provisions, passed this Committee unanimously and the full Senate 44-0. I respectfully request a favorable report on Senate Bill 80. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Bailey', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Senator Jack Bailey

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Uploaded by: Sarah Widman

Position: FAV



Wes Moore, Governor
Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor
Josh Kurtz, Acting Secretary

January 25, 2023

BILL NUMBER: Senate Bill 80– First Reader

SHORT TITLE: Natural Resources – Blue and Flathead Catfish Finfish Trotline License – Establishment

DEPARTMENT’S POSITION: SUPPORT

EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT’S POSITION

This law was previously in place until July 1, 2022. The intention of the license is to allow greater harvest of blue and flathead catfish by trotline in the Chesapeake Bay and its tidal tributaries.

These two species are highly invasive and the ability to use increased harvest with effective gears is an important tool in controlling these invasive fish populations. Although both species are considered invasive in the Chesapeake Bay, the threat of blue catfish is particularly concerning because of their increasing populations, rapid range expansion, and capacity to consume significant amounts of native species. This bill allows for an additional method of harvest for commercial harvesters who do not hold specific finfish harvest license authorizations that would allow such harvest. The bill also allows licensees to target invasive species that can cause both ecosystem and, in turn, economic damage.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Natural Resources Article, Section 4-701.2, abrogated on June 30, 2022 (SB 7, 2019). This law created an invasive catfish trotline license for \$15 that could be purchased whether an individual held an existing commercial tidal fish license under 4-701, or held no commercial tidal fish license. The Department had 101 individuals licensed in 2021-2022 under the previous law.

BILL EXPLANATION

The bill returns a blue and flathead catfish finfish trotline license for \$15 which can be held by individuals with existing tidal fish licenses under Natural Resources Article, Section 4-701, or those with no commercial tidal fish license. The license would allow commercial harvest and sale of the two species harvested with this gear.

Contact: Emily Wilson, Director, Legislative and Constituent Services (Acting)
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