



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

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March 26, 2024

**BILL NUMBER: House Bill 512 – Third Reader**

**SHORT TITLE: Natural Resources - Fish and Fisheries - Reporting Requirements**

**DEPARTMENT’S POSITION: SUPPORT**

**EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT’S POSITION**

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The Department supports this legislation. This legislation will give the Department the authority to transition to electronic reporting on a commercial and recreational fishery-wide basis. Since 2012, the Department has piloted programs in coordination with watermen to test electronic reporting through a system called FACTS. Since 2012, the agency continues to add additional electronic reporting pilot programs for various fisheries and at this time believes this method of reporting is effective and should begin to be incorporated fishery wide. This law change would not immediately require commercial fishing operations to use electronic reporting. It would enable DNR to expand the current system beyond the initial pilot programs, establishing them through the regulatory process, which would include multiple opportunities for affected parties to participate in the development of those rules.

DNR started piloting the FACTS electronic reporting system in 2012 for blue crab harvesters, but has since expanded to include finfish harvesters (including striped bass), charter captains, and shellfish harvesters. The software enables commercial fishermen to report their harvest in real-time online or over the phone through a 24-hour call center. This system provides an accountable harvest reporting system that benefits both fisheries managers and the industry. From January - December 2023 there were a total of 35,442 trips reported by FACTS participants.

Accountable harvest reporting enables DNR scientists and fisheries managers to more accurately evaluate fishing patterns to better understand overall fishing effort; an important variable, along with mortality and population, involved in making sustainable fisheries management decisions. This critical information helps the Department to make more timely and informed management decisions based on a more complete picture of harvest data.

Incomplete reports and the absence of information limits the Department’s ability to manage fisheries for maximum sustainable harvest. This ultimately hurts the commercial fishery as agency managers subsequently must err on the side of conservation, when instead there may be instances that warrant additional harvest in a sustainable manner; however, without complete data, fisheries managers are unable to confirm the impacts of that action.

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The agency is transitioning to a new license system and the ability for the recreational community to report may provide beneficial support to catch information in the future.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

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No similar bills have been proposed previously.

**BILL EXPLANATION**

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The bill as amended would add regulatory authority for the agency related to commercial and recreational reporting.