

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2026 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 947 (Delegate Sample-Hughes, *et al.*)
Environment and Transportation

**Department of Natural Resources - Commercial Blue and Flathead Catfish
Finfish Trotline License - Alterations**

This emergency bill modifies the “commercial blue and flathead catfish finfish trotline license” to be the “commercial blue and flathead catfish license” and modifies the allowable gear that may be used to catch blue catfish under the license to include a gill net – as defined in Department of Natural Resources (DNR) regulations – with a mesh size of not more than seven inches, in addition to the currently authorized finfish trotline.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill is not expected to materially affect State finances.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: Potential meaningful.

Analysis

Current Law: A commercial blue and flathead catfish finfish trotline license authorizes the holder to catch for sale blue and flathead catfish in the tidal waters of the State using a finfish trotline, as defined in DNR regulations. An applicant does not need to hold a tidal fish license (DNR’s primary commercial fishing license) to be eligible for the license. A licensee must fish in accordance with DNR regulations. The annual license fee is \$15.

Under DNR regulations:

- “Finfish trotline” means a length of rope or line, buoyed at both ends with one or more anchors, which is baited with hooks set at intervals for the purpose of catching finfish; and
- “Gill net” means a net which (1) is maintained in a vertical position in the water with sinkers, floats, or stakes, or a combination of sinkers, floats, and stakes, and (2) captures fish by means of a mesh too small to permit passage of the body of the fish or withdrawal of the head once the posterior margin of the gill covers has passed through the mesh.

Small Business Effect: Any current or future small business licensees harvesting blue catfish under the commercial blue and flathead catfish license (as renamed by the bill) may benefit from the ability to use a gill net (with a mesh size of up to seven inches) in addition to a finfish trotline under the license to increase the amount of blue catfish harvested. DNR indicates that gill nets are a very efficient gear type.

DNR indicates that there are 309 blue and flathead catfish finfish trotline licensees (during the 2025-2026 license year) and that preliminary harvest data for 2025 (for blue and flathead catfish finfish trotline licensees and tidal fish licensees) includes 2.0 million pounds of blue catfish harvested with a dockside value of \$1.37 million. DNR indicates that the harvest of blue catfish in the Chesapeake Bay watershed has increased substantially over the past decade, in part due to increased access to the fishery by those harvesting under blue and flathead catfish finfish trotline licenses.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

Designated Cross File: SB 610 (Senator Mautz) - Education, Energy, and the Environment.

Information Source(s): Department of Natural Resources; Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 27, 2026
jg/lgc

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