

119TH CONGRESS  
1ST SESSION

# H. R. 4294

To direct the Secretary of Commerce to establish a pilot program with respect to the sale of blue catfish caught within the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

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## IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JULY 7, 2025

Ms. ELFRETH (for herself, Mr. WITTMAN, Mrs. KIGGANS of Virginia, and Mr. HOYER) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Natural Resources

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## A BILL

To direct the Secretary of Commerce to establish a pilot program with respect to the sale of blue catfish caught within the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

1       *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*  
2       *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3       **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4       This Act may be cited as the “Mitigation Action and  
5       Watermen Support Act of 2025” or the “MAWS Act of  
6       2025”.

1 **SEC. 2. BLUE CATFISH PILOT PROGRAM.**

2 Section 307 of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric  
3 Administration Authorization Act of 1992 (15 U.S.C.  
4 1511d) is amended—

5 (1) by redesignating subsection (e) as sub-  
6 section (f); and

7 (2) by inserting after subsection (d) the fol-  
8 lowing:

9 “(e) BLUE CATFISH PILOT PROGRAM.—

10 “(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall estab-  
11 lish a pilot program to award amounts to covered  
12 entities to purchase, in accordance with paragraph  
13 (3)—

14 “(A) from watermen, blue catfish caught  
15 within the Chesapeake Bay Watershed by such  
16 watermen; and

17 “(B) from seafood processors, such blue  
18 catfish purchased by seafood processors from  
19 such watermen.

20 “(2) APPLICATIONS.—To be eligible to be  
21 awarded amounts under the pilot program, a covered  
22 entity shall submit to the Secretary an application in  
23 such form, at such time, and containing such infor-  
24 mation as the Secretary determines appropriate.

25 “(3) USE OF AMOUNTS.—A covered entity that  
26 is awarded amounts under the pilot program—

1           “(A) shall use such amounts to purchase  
2           blue catfish from watermen or seafood proc-  
3           essors for at least the amount determined by  
4           the Secretary under paragraph (5); and

5           “(B) may use not more than 15 percent of  
6           such amounts to offset the cost to transport  
7           such blue catfish to manufacturing or proc-  
8           essing facilities.

9           “(4) WATERMAN AND SEAFOOD PROCESSOR  
10          ELIGIBILITY.—To be eligible to sell a blue catfish  
11          under the pilot program to a covered entity that is  
12          awarded amounts under the pilot program—

13           “(A) a waterman shall certify to such a  
14           covered entity that the waterman caught the  
15           blue catfish within the Chesapeake Bay Water-  
16           shed; and

17           “(B) a seafood processor shall certify to  
18           such a covered entity that the seafood processor  
19           purchased the blue catfish from a waterman  
20           who caught the blue catfish within the Chesa-  
21           peake Bay Watershed.

22           “(5) DETERMINATION OF MINIMUM PURCHASE  
23          AMOUNT.—With respect to blue catfish sold by  
24          watermen or seafood processors under the pilot pro-

1       gram, the Secretary shall determine the minimum  
2       price per pound, taking into consideration—

3               “(A) market factors;

4               “(B) feedback from watermen, seafood  
5       processors, and covered entities who participate  
6       in the pilot program, if available; and

7               “(C) differentiation of price points for fillet  
8       and byproduct.

9               “(6) REPORT.—Not later than 180 days after  
10      the date on which the pilot program terminates in  
11      accordance with paragraph (7), the Secretary shall  
12      submit to Congress a report regarding the pilot pro-  
13      gram, including the following information:

14              “(A) An estimate of the size and spawning  
15      stock biomass of the blue catfish population in  
16      the Chesapeake Bay Watershed prior to and at  
17      the conclusion of the pilot program, using the  
18      most recent data available.

19              “(B) The size distribution and diet of the  
20      blue catfish population in the Chesapeake Bay  
21      Watershed during and at the conclusion of the  
22      pilot program.

23              “(C) The number of blue catfish and the  
24      amount of blue catfish (measured in pounds)

1           caught by watermen who participate in the pilot  
2           program during the pilot program.

3           “(D) The effect of the pilot program on  
4           species other than the blue catfish in and the  
5           environment of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

6           “(E) The economic effect of the pilot pro-  
7           gram on watermen who participate in the pilot  
8           program, including—

9                   “(i) the revenue generated by each  
10                  such waterman by selling blue catfish  
11                  under the pilot program; and

12                  “(ii) catch data with respect to and  
13                  revenue generated from other species  
14                  fished by such watermen during the pilot  
15                  program.

16           “(F) The market response to the pilot pro-  
17           gram, including—

18                   “(i) the total amount awarded to cov-  
19                  ered entities under the pilot program; and

20                   “(ii) trends in the types of covered en-  
21                  tities awarded amounts under the pilot  
22                  program.

23           “(G) With respect to the manufacturing or  
24           processing practices of each covered entity that  
25           is awarded amounts under the pilot program,

1 information regarding whether each such cov-  
2 ered entity—

3 “(i) uses internal or third-party man-  
4 ufacturers or processors;

5 “(ii) uses, for each type of food prod-  
6 uct produced by the covered entity, whole  
7 fish, fillet, or byproduct; and

8 “(iii) if the covered entity uses only  
9 part of the fish, sells the remainder to  
10 third parties.

11 “(H) How each covered entity that is  
12 awarded amounts under the pilot program  
13 transports blue catfish purchased by the cov-  
14 ered entity, including—

15 “(i) whether the covered entity freezes  
16 such blue catfish;

17 “(ii) how often the covered entity  
18 picks up such blue catfish; and

19 “(iii) whether the covered entity uses  
20 a seafood transport company that is local  
21 to the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

22 “(I) Policy recommendations regarding—

23 “(i) the continuation of the pilot pro-  
24 gram in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed;  
25 and

1 “(ii) the expansion of the pilot pro-  
2 gram to other watersheds, including—

3 “(I) best practices;

4 “(II) specific recommendations  
5 regarding invasive species of carp in  
6 the Mississippi rivershed;

7 “(III) with respect to other  
8 invasive aquatic species and water-  
9 sheds that may benefit from the pilot  
10 program; and

11 “(IV) other strategies with re-  
12 spect to the mitigation of aquatic  
13 invasive species for Congress to con-  
14 sider piloting.

15 “(7) DURATION.—The Secretary shall carry out  
16 the pilot program from January 1, 2027 through  
17 December 31, 2029.

18 “(8) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—  
19 There are authorized to be appropriated to the Sec-  
20 retary to carry out the pilot program \$2,000,000 for  
21 each fiscal year for the duration of the pilot program  
22 in accordance with paragraph (7).

23 “(9) DEFINITIONS.—In this subsection:

24 “(A) ANIMAL FEED.—The term ‘animal  
25 feed’—

1 “(i) means an article that is intended  
2 for use—

3 “(I) for food for an animal other  
4 than man; and

5 “(II) as a substantial source of  
6 nutrients in the diet of such an ani-  
7 mal; and

8 “(ii) is not limited to a mixture in-  
9 tended to be the sole ration of such an ani-  
10 mal.

11 “(B) AQUACULTURE FEED.—The term  
12 ‘aquaculture feed’—

13 “(i) means an article that is intended  
14 for use—

15 “(I) for food for an aquacultural  
16 species, including any species of  
17 finfish, mollusk, crustacean (or other  
18 aquatic invertebrate), amphibian, rep-  
19 tile, ornamental fish, or aquatic plant  
20 that is propagated and reared in a  
21 controlled or selected environment;  
22 and

23 “(II) as a substantial source of  
24 nutrients in the diet of such an  
25 aquacultural species; and

1 “(ii) is not limited to a mixture in-  
2 tended to be the sole ration of such an  
3 aquacultural species.

4 “(C) BLUE CATFISH.—The term ‘blue cat-  
5 fish’ means the species *Ictalurus furcatus*.

6 “(D) CHESAPEAKE BAY WATERSHED.—  
7 The term ‘Chesapeake Bay Watershed’ means  
8 the region that covers—

9 “(i) the Chesapeake Bay;

10 “(ii) the portions of the States of  
11 Delaware, Maryland, New York, Pennsyl-  
12 vania, Virginia, and West Virginia that  
13 drain into the Chesapeake Bay; and

14 “(iii) the District of Columbia.

15 “(E) COVERED ENTITY.—The term ‘cov-  
16 ered entity’ means a person engaged in the  
17 business of manufacturing or processing—

18 “(i) pet food;

19 “(ii) animal feed; or

20 “(iii) aquaculture feed.

21 “(F) PILOT PROGRAM.—The term ‘pilot  
22 program’ means the pilot program established  
23 under paragraph (1).

24 “(G) SEAFOOD PROCESSOR.—The term  
25 ‘seafood processor’ means a person engaged in

1 the business of preparing or packaging fish or  
2 fish products (including fish harvested by the  
3 processor) for sale.

4 “(H) SECRETARY.—The term ‘Secretary’  
5 means the Secretary of Commerce, acting  
6 through the Administrator of the National  
7 Oceans and Atmospheric Administration.”.

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