

Fiscal Analysis: This fiscal impact statement is preliminary and will be updated as additional information is received.

Department of Planning and Budget
2026 General Assembly Session
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This bill requires MRC to establish and maintain a voluntary Chesapeake Wild Harvest certification and labeling program for any blue catfish that is taken or caught in the Chesapeake Bay or its tributaries and is processed in the Commonwealth. According to MRC, administering this program would require new administrative, verification, recordkeeping, and oversight functions beyond the Commission's existing statutory roles. While the agency currently regulates commercial gear types and collects commercial harvest and dealer reporting information for blue catfish harvested from tidal waters, the agency states that it does not currently certify seafood dealers or processes, verifying labeling claims, or maintain certification databases related to product origin or processing.

Implementation of this program would require MRC to develop eligibility criteria and application materials, review and verify dealer and processor submissions, maintain a registry of certified participants, coordinate with industry to ensure appropriate use of the label, and engage in administrative oversight to ensure program integrity. According to the agency, these responsibilities would require dedicated staff with experience in fisheries management, seafood industry operations, regulatory coordination, and program administration.

According to MRC, the agency does not currently have staff or systems dedicated to administering a certification or labeling program of this nature. MRC anticipates needing an additional Environmental Specialist II position to administer the program and serve as the primary point of contact for participating harvesters, dealers, and processors at an ongoing general fund cost of \$121,945. The agency also anticipates \$12,000 in ongoing costs associated with travel for stakeholder meetings, contractual support for database configuration, label standards development, and legal review of certification language, and program supplies and materials. Startup costs of \$5,000 in FY 2027 through FY 2029 would be required for information technology updates associated with establishing and maintaining a secure certification registry or database to track certified participants and maintain program records.

MRC anticipates that it may need to coordinate with the Marine Products Board under VDACS and DWR to establish and maintain the Chesapeake Wild Harvest certification and labeling program required under this bill. Impact estimates from DWR are not yet available.

It is anticipated that the Marine Products Board would require additional general fund resources to administer the proposed Chesapeake Wild Harvest certification. The administrative costs are estimated to be \$10,000 per year, and additional costs for graphic design services, trademarking, State Corporation Commission registration, printing and storage of labels, and shipping to users are estimated to be \$35,000 per year. Additional resources may be needed depending on interest in the program.

The Marine Products Board currently operates on license fees from MRC, which are nongeneral funds. Annual revenue is typically just over \$300,000, and expenditures in recent years have varied from about \$240,000 to just over \$520,000. Approximately \$225,000 annually supports salary and fringe for the two positions detailed in Item 86 D. of the Introduced Budget; other Board-supported activities include overhead for these positions and marketing Virginia seafood via trade advertising, direct marketing calls, and merchandising programs for wholesale distributors, retailers, and restaurateurs. The Board currently has a cash balance of \$311,504, a

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decrease from \$453,402 at the end of FY 2025 and \$662,179 at the end of FY 2024. The Board does not anticipate having enough nongeneral funds to support additional ongoing expenses.

Other: None.