

**WRITTEN STATEMENT FROM
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

**ON THE
LEGISLATIVE HEARING ON HR 4770 and HR 5009**

**BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER, WILDLIFE, AND FISHERIES
COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

Chairman Bentz, Ranking Member Huffman, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today and to discuss H.R. 4770, “Chesapeake Bay Science, Education, and Ecosystem Enhancement Act of 2023,” and H.R. 5009, “Wildlife Innovation and Longevity Driver reauthorization Act” or the “WILD Act.”

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is responsible for the stewardship of the nation’s living marine resources and their habitat. NOAA Fisheries provide vital services for the nation: sustainable and productive fisheries, safe sources of seafood, the recovery and conservation of protected species, and healthy ecosystems—all backed by sound science and an ecosystem-based approach to management. The resilience of our marine ecosystems and coastal communities depends on healthy marine species, including protected species such as whales, sea turtles, salmon, and corals.

H.R. 4770 would reauthorize the NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office, update our legislative authority, and provide additional direction and flexibility. We would like to thank Rep. Sarbanes for introducing this important piece of bipartisan legislation along with the bill’s three co-sponsors who represent the Chesapeake Bay watershed jurisdictions of Maryland and Virginia.

NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office

The NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office (NCBO) is a division of the Office of Habitat Conservation within the NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service. NCBO uses its capabilities in science, restoration, and community engagement to improve the understanding, management, and stewardship of the Chesapeake Bay. NCBO focuses on sustainable fisheries and habitat science, oyster restoration, oceanographic and meteorological observations, environmental literacy, and community partnerships.

NOAA has been a partner in the Chesapeake Bay Program since 1984. In 2014, NOAA and its Federal and state partners committed to the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement, which included goals supporting the restoration and protection of the Bay watershed and guiding the work of the Chesapeake Bay Program.

NCBO is the Federal agency lead working to implement the Watershed Agreement objectives for oysters, blue crabs, forage species, and fish habitat. As part of this effort, NCBO is working with partners to support the restoration of oyster populations in 10 Bay tributaries by 2025—the largest oyster reef restoration project in the world. NCBO funds important fisheries research that provides real-world applications that support Federal and state marine resource managers.

NCBO is also committed to place-based initiatives to improve fisheries habitat and coastal community resilience in the Choptank River Habitat Focus Area in Maryland and the Middle Peninsula of Virginia.

NCBO monitors Bay conditions by maintaining the Chesapeake Bay Interpretive Buoy System. This network of buoys, acoustic receivers, and water column sensors tracks water quality, fish movement, and weather information at key locations and delivers this data to NOAA colleagues engaged in marine weather and ecological forecasting, as well as to boaters, recreational anglers, and other researchers.

In support of the Environmental Literacy Goal of the Watershed Agreement, NCBO partners with states and school districts throughout the region to increase systemic and sustainable implementation of K-12 environmental literacy programs through the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Education and Training (B-WET) competitive grant program.

Climate change is a critical issue facing the Chesapeake Bay and its watershed. Climate considerations are embedded into all NCBO does—from observations and fisheries research to education, workforce development, and community engagement programs. NCBO coordinates the Chesapeake Bay Program's climate and resilience activities, including supporting the development of green infrastructure in underserved communities.

Finally, NCBO is strongly committed to increasing diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice both in our office culture and in our programs. We do this by actively seeking engagement of underserved communities in our place-based initiatives, supporting internship programs focused on students from populations historically excluded from science fields, and ensuring our grant funding supports the priorities of diverse communities and is accessible to them.

H.R. 4770 - Chesapeake Science, Education, and Ecosystem Enhancement Act

NOAA supports the objectives of H.R. 4770, which would reauthorize the NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office and update its legislative authority.

The bill would recognize and provide authority for long-standing NCBO programs and activities, including two programs not included in the 2002 reauthorization act—the Chesapeake Bay Interpretive Buoy System and the Chesapeake B-WET Program. The Chesapeake Bay Coastal Living Resources Management and Habitat Program will also allow for development of programs that restore, protect, and build the resilience of critical coastal habitats and vulnerable communities to offset the effects of climate change.

This legislation would authorize NCBO with the tools and capabilities to directly support the conservation and restoration goals of NOAA, the Chesapeake Bay Program, and the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement.

H.R. 5009 (Rep. Joyce of Ohio), “Wildlife Innovation and Longevity Driver reauthorization Act” or the “WILD Act”

The Marine Turtle Conservation Act supports international sea turtle conservation and recovery. Through the Marine Turtle Conservation Fund, USFWS provides financial and technical assistance to international partners to reduce terrestrial and marine threats to sea turtles and to better assess and understand their population status. NOAA Fisheries coordinates with USFWS to identify high priority projects and provide financial and technical assistance.

Conclusion

NOAA is proud to continue to be a leader in conducting ocean science, serving the nation’s coastal communities and industries, and ensuring responsible stewardship of our ocean and coastal resources. We value the opportunity to continue working with this Subcommittee on these important issues. Thank you, Members of the Subcommittee and your staff for your work to support NOAA’s mission. I am happy to take your questions.