

# Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services: Highlights from the Blue Catfish Work Group Report

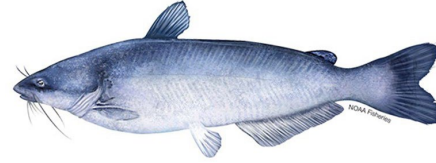
September 1, 2025

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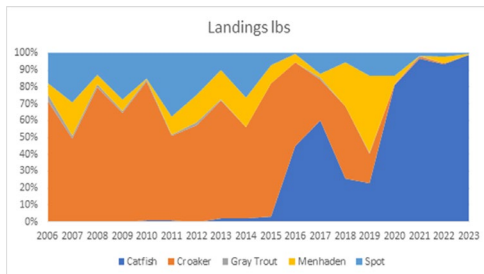


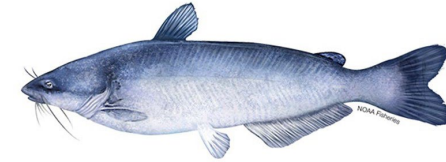
*Ictalurus furcatus*

# Blue Catfish



In response to the growing economic and ecological concerns presented by the continued spread of invasive blue catfish in the waters of the Commonwealth, Chapters 218 and 240 of the 2024 Acts of Assembly (Acts) required the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) to convene a work group of stakeholders that have a vested interest in reducing the negative ecological effects of blue catfish and increasing the marketing, processing, and sale of blue catfish in the Commonwealth (Work Group).

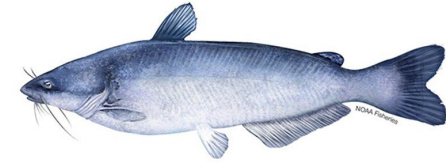




# Required Work Group Representation

- 1) Marine Resources Commission (VMRC)
- 2) Department of Corrections (VDOC)
- 3) Department of Education (VDOE)
- 4) James River Association
- 5) Virginia Seafood Agricultural Research and Extension Center (VSAREC)
- 6) Virginia Marine Products Board (VMPB)
- 7) Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS)
- 8) Virginia Waterman's Association
- 9) Virginia Restaurant, Lodging & Travel Association (VRLTA)
- 10) Current and prospective blue catfish processors
- 11) Friends of the Rappahannock
- 12) Chesapeake Bay Foundation
- 13) Other state agencies or stakeholders deemed necessary by VDACS.

# Specific Charge

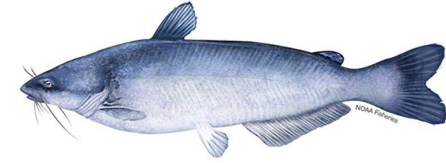


## 1) Review past and ongoing efforts to promote the creation of a market for blue catfish

- Recognized numerous entities involved in Blue Catfish marketing.
- Recommended 1 FTE under the Virginia Marine Products Board to:
  - a) Consolidate and disburse grant and funding opportunities.
  - b) Promote marketing and production efforts
    - i) Include targeted media campaign influencers such as celebrity chefs, chef competitions, and festivals revolving around the theme that blue catfish tastes good, is good for you, and eating it is good for the environment.
- Labeling blue catfish as “Chesapeake Wild Harvest” to differentiate it from farmed fish.



# Specific Charge



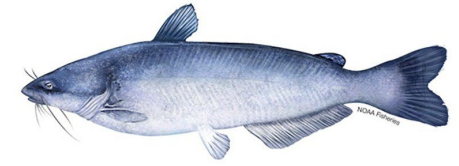
## 2) Identify and explore potential sectors for the blue catfish market.

- Promotions
  - a) Sponsored events to promote catching and eating of blue catfish
  - b) Social media marketing strategy
  - c) Expand and enhance the use of the Department of Wildlife Resources “Go Outdoor Virginia” app for anglers to use to show where they are catching fish, with the data being used to understand where the fish are and encourage others to fish there.





# Specific Charge



## 2) Identify and explore potential sectors for the blue catfish market.

- Education
  - a) Showcase the nutritional comparison of blue catfish to other fish
  - b) Program to enhance consumer education.
  - c) How to properly prepare the fish for both institutions and end user consumers.



PROGRAM DATES: SEPTEMBER 11, 18, 25

**Virginia Cooperative Extension**  
Virginia Tech • Virginia State University

**The Nutrition Value of the Chesapeake Bay Blue Catfish**

*Authored by Jimmy Fong, Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist, Virginia Seafood Agricultural Research and Extension Center, Virginia Tech; Huihui Huang, Associate Professor, Food Science and Technology, Virginia Tech; Sam O'Keefe, Professor, Food Science and Technology, Virginia Tech; Jonathan van Santen, Associate Director, Virginia Seafood Agricultural Research and Extension Center and Associate Professor and Extension Specialist, Agricultural and Applied Economics, Virginia Tech; Doreen Sun, Extension Specialist, Virginia Seafood Agricultural Research and Extension Center, Virginia Tech; and Michael Schwartz, Director, Virginia Seafood Agricultural Research and Extension Center, Virginia Tech*

The Chesapeake Bay blue catfish (*Ictalurus furcatus*), originally native to the Mississippi, Missouri, and Ohio river basins, was introduced to Virginia waters for recreational fishing in the 1970s (Holling et al. 2023). Now an invasive species in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, it thrives in tributaries such as the Potomac, James, and York rivers. These large, slate-blue fish with smooth, scaleless skin and whisker-like barbels can grow up to 5 feet and exceed 100 pounds. As opportunistic predators, they feed on fish, crabs, mussels, and more, impacting native species like blue crabs and striped bass (Schloesser et al. 2011).

In response to this ecological challenge, initiatives that encourage the consumption of Chesapeake Bay blue catfish have emerged, with goals that include enhancing public health, conserving the Virginia watershed ecosystem, and boosting the commonwealth's economy. As a result, Virginia harvested 3.6 million pounds in 2022, worth \$2.1 million (NOAA 2024). Figure 1 shows blue catfish fillets for sale in a seafood market in Hampton, Virginia.

This publication examines the nutritional profile of blue catfish, as recently determined by the Virginia Seafood Agricultural Research and Extension Center, highlighting its value as a healthy and sustainable seafood option.

**Nutritional Profiles Determined**

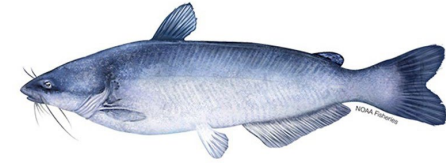
The nutritional profiles of Chesapeake Bay blue catfish fillets (all fish tested were caught in winter 2024), measured on a wet weight basis, are as follows per 100 grams:

- Protein: 16.63 g ± 1.99 g
- Fat: 5.95 g ± 1.08 g
- Moisture: 74.32 g ± 0.72 g
- Ash: 1.00 g ± 0.13 g

These values indicate that blue catfish fillets are rich in protein and omega-3 fatty acids (table 1) and have a high moisture content, typical of fresh fish. Insignificant

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# Specific Charge

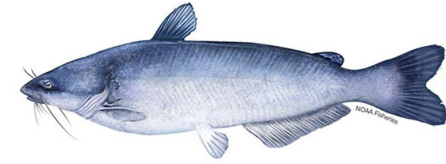


## 2) Identify and explore potential sectors for the blue catfish market.

- Immediate impact on customer base:
  - a) Department of Education and Correction.
  - b) Easing restrictions on the cost per meal per person to allow for greater use of blue catfish within correctional facilities.
  - c) Introduce incentives for a certain percentage of food (suggest 20 %) to be sourced locally (state of Virginia) for all state funded institutions and federally funded child nutrition programs.



# Specific Charge



3) Identify any actions that the Commonwealth can take to promote and expand the market for blue catfish.

- Consolidation of information on potentially available funding sources:
  - a) Fisheries Innovation for Sustainable Harvest Fund Labeling blue catfish as “Chesapeake Wild Harvest” to differentiate it from farmed fish.
  - b) Marine Fisheries Improvement Grant Program
  - c) Agriculture and Forestry Industries Development Fund (AFID) Blue Catfish Processing, Flash Freezing, and Infrastructure Grant Program.



Virginia Ag Council: 2024 – 2025.  
\$19,432

*A comparative study to investigate the nutrition, flavor and consumer acceptance differences between Virginia blue catfish and farm-raised catfish*



Virginia Ag Council: 2025 – 2026.  
\$19,557

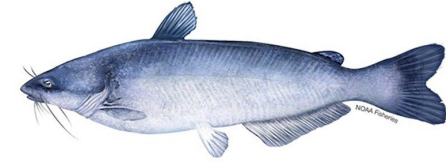
*Integrated Bioprocessing of Blue Catfish Byproducts: Creating Value-Added Products for Virginia's Circular Bioeconomy*



VT – CALS: 2025 – 2026. \$75,000  
*Catalyzing a Sustainable and Resilient Wild-caught Blue Catfish Industry in the Chesapeake Bay*



# Specific Charge



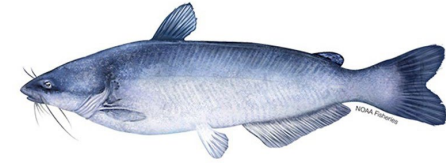
3) Identify any actions that the Commonwealth can take to promote and expand the market for blue catfish.

- General Assembly budgetary actions:

- a) Increase institutional funding for local purchases
- b) Fund the Fisheries Innovation for Sustainable Harvest Fund
- c) Additional funding to increase support for VMRC's Commissioners Waterman's Apprenticeship Program and add an additional FTE for outreach and resource connection.
- d) Maintain and increase funding for the AFID Blue Catfish Processing, Flash Freezing, and Infrastructure Grant Program
- e) Additional funding to DWR to revise the Go Virginia" app



# Specific Charge

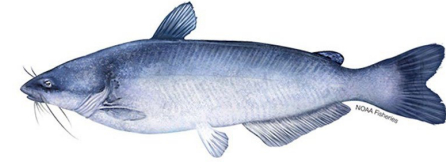


3) Identify any actions that the Commonwealth can take to promote and expand the market for blue catfish.

- General Assembly budgetary actions:
  - f) Authorize and fund an FTE for the VMPB grants manager
  - g) EO 14276 “Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness” joint Commonwealth resolution to Congress encouraging moving Blue Catfish back to an FDA regulated item from the United States Department of Agriculture.



# Additional take-aways not in report



## 3) Additional discussion take-aways not in report:

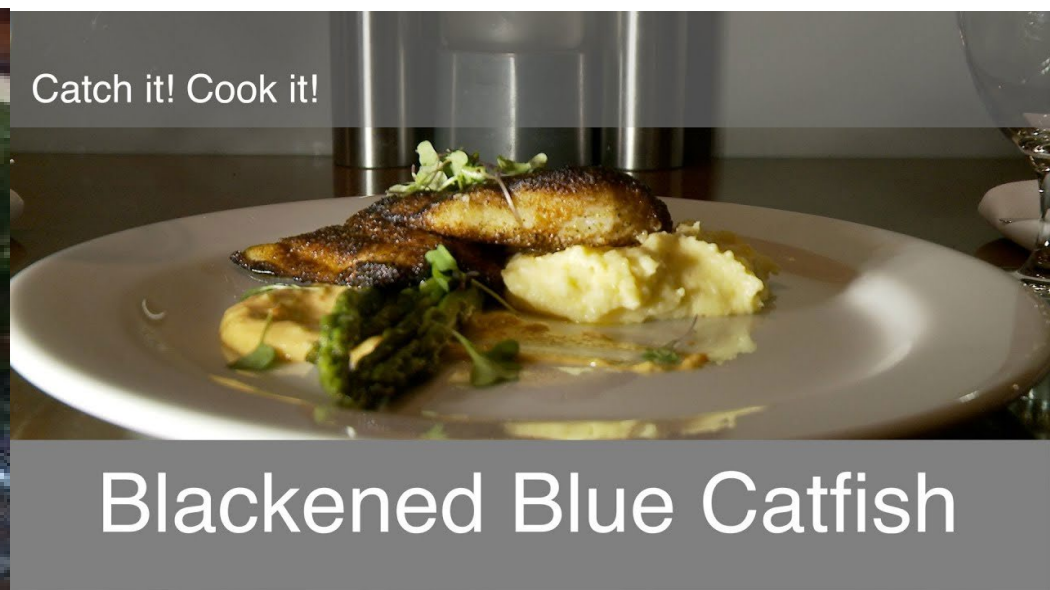
- Opportunity for fish depots or hubs
- Need for additional landing locations
- Opportunity for live-haul vessels
- Significant international market interest







**Is it lunch time?**



Catch it! Cook it!

**Blackened Blue Catfish**