Date:

**Re: H. 898: AN ACT TO END THE TAKING OF HORSESHOE CRABS FOR BAIT**

**Dear [Recipient's Name],**

Now is the time for Massachusetts to affirm its leadership in environmental stewardship. Your support for **H. 898, An Act to End the Taking of Horseshoe Crabs for Bait (Appendix 1)**, would be a significant step toward protecting a critical species and the ecosystems that depend on them.

As a constituent and [Your Affiliation - e.g., concerned citizen, marine scientist, etc.], I strongly urge your support for **H. 898**.

Horseshoe crabs play an essential role in medical science, as their blue blood is indispensable for endotoxin testing, which ensures the safety of medical products and vaccines. Unfortunately, these ecologically and scientifically invaluable creatures are harvested for use as bait in whelk and eel fisheries. This practice is unnecessary and unsustainable, especially given the availability of alternative bait sources such as the invasive green crab, which are abundant in our waters and negatively impacting the shellfish industry.

The stage is set. After decades of ineffective regulations to increase horseshoe crab populations, a consortium of environmental groups in 2024 pushed for stronger protections for spawning crabs. This action prompted the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries to implement a partial ban on harvesting during spawning season, representing a small step toward horseshoe crab recovery.

Nevertheless, the fishing industry is still allowed to take 140,000 horseshoe crabs each year for use as bait. Female horseshoe crabs can lay up to 80,000 eggs, so continuing the bait take dramatically limits the ability of this species to replenish its population.

Though insufficient to assure recovery of horseshoe crab populations, the recent regulatory changes do acknowledge that this ancient creature is critical to human health and the entire Atlantic coastal ecosystem.

Horseshoe crabs are at the center of a complex food web that stretches from Maine to Florida —and even further. The red knot, for example, listed as threatened under the U.S. and Massachusetts Endangered Species Act, migrates from South America to its nesting grounds in the Arctic and back again, fueled in large part by horseshoe crab eggs––once found in abundance on our beaches.

The ‘center’ is not holding. Continuing loss of habitat, and exploitation by the bait and biomedical industries, have severely depleted horseshoe crab populations in Massachusetts, leading to near functional extinction. This decline has significant consequences for the entire ecosystem, including many commercially important fish and shellfish species.

Ending the ‘bait take’ will give horseshoe crabs and the species that depend on them for food, a real opportunity to recover.

Take note, the tide is also changing for horseshoe crab use by the pharmaceutical industry. The U.S. Pharmacopeia, a nonprofit entity that sets guidance for the pharmaceutical industry, has approved a new rule that allows US-based biomedical companies to utilize synthetic alternatives for detecting toxins in injectable medicines and implants. Leading pharmaceutical companies, such as Eli Lilly, have already moved to replace horseshoe crab blood in their operations, recognizing the supply chain and reliability benefits of synthetic methods.

Other states have taken decisive action to protect horseshoe crabs:

* ﻿﻿**Delaware Bay Region**: Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC), which sets bait harvest quotas, has previously restricted harvest of female horseshoe crabs and is considering a longer, multiyear ban currently.
* **New Jersey**: Imposed a moratorium on bait take of horseshoe crabs.
* ﻿﻿**Maine**: It is unlawful to take, kill or possess or injure horseshoe crabs or eggs between May 1 and October 30.
* **New York**: The Legislature passed the Horseshoe Crab Protection Act in 2024: "No person shall take horseshoe crabs, including for commercial or biomedical purposes, from the waters of this state." Governor Hochul declined to sign it. Advocates are preparing to resubmit the bill in 2025.
* **Connecticut**: Banned the hand harvest of Horseshoe Crabs in 2023 through Public Act 23-6.

Connecticut Governor Lamont when signing his state’s legislation stated: “This law says that we need to take a break and let this species regenerate and get back to a state of good health. I strongly urge our neighboring states to join this growing coalition and enact similar laws to protect the population in their waters.”

By supporting **H. 898**, Massachusetts can join this growing coalition of states committed to safeguarding the horseshoe crab and the ecosystems it supports. This legislation is a critical step toward ensuring the recovery of horseshoe crab populations, preserving biodiversity, and fostering sustainable fishing practices.

Thank you for your leadership on this important issue. I urge you to lend your full support to this essential piece of legislation and consider signing on as a co-sponsor with Petitioners Representative Michelle Badger, 1st Plymouth District; Senator Patrick M. O'Connor, First Plymouth and Norfolk; and Representative Jay D. Livingstone, 8th Suffolk.

Sincerely,
[Your Name]
[Your Contact Information]

Appendix 1

**HOUSE  .  .  .  .  .  .  .  .  .  .  .  .  .  .  .  No. 898**

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| By Representative Badger of Plymouth, a petition (accompanied by bill, House, No. 898) of Michelle L. Badger relative to the use of horseshoe crabs for bait.  Environment and Natural Resources. |

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

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**In the One Hundred and Ninety-Fourth General Court**
**(2025-2026)**

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An Act to end the taking of horseshoe crabs for bait.

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:*

Chapter 130 of the General Laws is hereby amended by adding the following section:

Section 107. (a) As used in this section, the following term shall, unless the context clearly requires otherwise, have the following meaning:

“Horseshoe crab,” the species known as Limulus polyphemus.

(b) No person shall engage in the harvesting of horseshoe crabs or the eggs of horseshoe crabs from coastal waters to be used as bait.

(b) The director may authorize the taking of horseshoe crabs by permit for educational or scientific purposes; provided that, the director determines that such harvesting will not cause harm to the horseshoe crab population of coastal waters.

(c) The taking of horseshoe crabs incidentally during legal fishing operations shall not violate this section if the horseshoe crabs are returned immediately to coastal waters unharmed.

(d) Any person who violates the provisions of this section shall be fined $25 for each horseshoe crab taken from coastal waters. No penalty shall result in possessing a cast off or molted shell also known as an exoskeleton of a horseshoe crab.

(e) Pursuant to chapter 30A, the division shall promulgate rules and regulations to enforce the provisions of this section.