



Friends of Animals' Testimony in support of H898 to protect horseshoe crabs from being killed as bait.

From Nicole Rivard <nrivard@friendsofanimals.org>
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To Joint Committee on Environment and Natural Resources (LEG)
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Honorable members of the Joint Committee on Environment and Natural Resources:

My name is Nicole Rivard and I'm government relations manager for Friends of Animals, an international animal advocacy group founded in 1957. I am testifying on behalf of our thousands of Massachusetts members.

Currently headquartered in CT, we led the efforts here to ban the killing of horseshoe crabs for bait or biomedical purposes—it passed in 2023. Similar legislation passed the NY State Legislature this summer and is awaiting Gov. Hochul's signature.

These efforts to save horseshoe crabs from extinction may not have as big of an impact if they're still being killed in places like Massachusetts.

Despite stricter regulations, fishers in MA can still kill 140,000 horseshoe crabs annually. In 2024, Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries issued 185 Horseshoe Crab Bait permits. The agency's data reveals that 40 fishers participated in 2024, earning a total of \$280,000, which means they're pushing horseshoe crabs to extinction for a measly \$7,000 each!

Massachusetts must stop myopically protecting the commercial fishing industry by allowing the reckless, unnecessary killing of horseshoe crabs for bait so people could eat smoked eel and conch fritters.

The low numbers of horseshoe crabs are leading to a steep decline and possible extinction of other species—such as the threatened red knot—a shorebird who depends on horseshoe crab eggs for food to fuel its epic biannual flights.

Brand new research from the Maritime Aquarium (<https://www.maritimeaquarium.org/newsroom/posts/new-studies-urge-immediate-coordinated-action-for-the-protection-of-horseshoe-crabs>)

in Connecticut reveals horseshoe crab populations have plummeted to "severe" levels. Immediate action is needed to prevent horseshoe crabs from going extinct, the authors say, adding that the New England area has been understudied and under protected.

The study gave researchers a comprehensive look at horseshoe crab trends not just in the Long Island Sound's offshore waters, but also in its 115 bays, harbors and coves.

Atlantic horseshoe crabs are in such dire straits that Friends of Animals and other advocacy groups have petitioned to list them under the Endangered Species Act. On Sept. 29, Friends of

Animals notified the U.S. Secretary of Commerce that it plans to bring a lawsuit if he does not respond in 60 days.

While this bill doesn't won't stop the killing of horseshoe crabs for biomedical purposes, I feel compelled to mention that May 1 marked a pivotal shift in the biomedical industry that changes the tide for imperiled Atlantic horseshoe crabs. U.S. pharmaceutical companies are now allowed to use animal-free alternatives—the reagents rFC and rCR— in tests to detect toxic substances in injectable medicines and implants rather than the blue blood of the horseshoe crab.

Now the biomedical industry has no excuse not to stop wasting the lives of horseshoe crabs. The new standard was proposed and adopted by U.S. Pharmacopeia.

No one should be debating whether horseshoe crab numbers are plentiful enough to allow their commercial slaughter in the first place—it's always been scientifically and morally unjustifiable.

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