

April 18, 2025



International Conservation Fund
for nature

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House Chair Christine Barber
Joint Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

Dear House Chair Barber,

We write to express our strong support for House Bill H.898, legislation that would prohibit the taking of horseshoe crabs for use as bait in commercial fishing in Massachusetts.

The International Conservation Fund, which is based in Boston, is focused on protecting biodiversity and endangered species where they are most imperilled, and one of our programs is dedicated to protecting shorebirds. Shorebird populations are currently suffering steep declines at migratory staging sites along the Atlantic coast. Shorebirds, like the Red Knot, have relied on specific flyways for millennia, with their migration paths finely tuned to the rhythm of nature. For a mere 200-gram bird like the Red Knot to navigate a 15,000-kilometer flight, numerous factors must align. Any disruption along these flyways poses a severe threat, potentially leading to a collapse in the population of these incredible birds.

Horseshoe crabs play a foundational role in coastal ecosystems. Their eggs are a vital food source for local shorebirds, and migratory shorebirds such as the federally threatened Red Knot, as well as for numerous marine species of ecological and commercial importance. Horseshoe crabs are on the brink of functional extinction in Massachusetts. To restore biodiversity along our shores, we must take immediate action to significantly reduce unnecessary mortality—starting with ending their use as bait.

Massachusetts' horseshoe crab population is nearing collapse. Decades of ongoing harvest, habitat loss, and climate stress have taken a severe toll. With a 12-year maturation period, recovery is nearly impossible under current pressures. Without reducing harvest pressures, this ancient species—and the ecosystem and industries that rely on it—may not recover.

This legislation is critical to safeguarding Massachusetts' rapidly declining horseshoe crab population and securing the long-term health and sustainability of our coastal ecosystems.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Molly Bartlett'.

Molly Bartlett, ICF President