

# Save the Cownose Rays Coalition

*BAN THE KILLING CONTESTS ON THE CHESAPEAKE BAY*



## 2017 PROHIBITION ON COWNOSE RAY CONTESTS (HB0211 / SB0268)– FACT SHEET

*Cownose rays migrate to the Bay in May to give birth to their pups and mate almost immediately afterwards. Tragically, rays' migration has become one that often ends in a cruel death: People come to Maryland to compete in killing contests on the Bay for prize money.*

***These contests are currently legal in Maryland, but we can change that through this legislation.***



### WHY THEY SHOULD BE BANNED:

#### **These contests are cruel.**

- Contest participants shoot cownose rays from their boats at close range with arrows, bludgeon them with bats, pile them into a barrel to suffocate and then, after weighing the rays to see who killed the largest one, they throw the rays away.
- Recent videos have highlighted the brutality of these contests, which have been taking place for two decades, largely unnoticed until now.

#### **These contests are unnecessary.**

- The event is run merely for entertainment and prizes — cownose rays are rarely eaten. For example, Virginia's considerable efforts to market ray meat in the U.S., Europe and Asia have failed due to the difficulty of preparing it and because of its "urine flavor."
- Contestants have been filmed dumping rays' bodies back into the water or tossing them into dumpsters, which is the legal definition of wanton waste: to intentionally waste something negligently or inappropriately. It's also legalized blood sport.
- Scientists have shown that cownose rays are not responsible for oyster population collapses.
  - A 2016 report by Florida State University's Dean Grubbs et al. debunked an earlier study that had blamed cownose rays. The Grubbs report explains that the oyster populations had declined long before, victims of disease, over-harvesting, over-sedimentation and habitat loss.<sup>1</sup>
  - The Grubbs report also states that oysters and hard clams were found in less than three percent of cownose rays' stomachs examined in the Chesapeake Bay.<sup>1</sup>

### **These contests are potentially harmful to the Bay's ecosystem.**

- Scientific evidence suggests that, since rays don't mate until they are several years old and female rays give birth to just one pup a year, their population growth is slow and rays are vulnerable to overfishing.
  - These contests often take place in June when female rays are pregnant, so their unborn pups are killed too.
  - Cownose rays are not invasive: they have been a part of the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem since before Captain John Smith arrived there. These animals are integral members of the Bay's ecology and have coexisted with oysters and scallops for thousands of years.

#### **According to the National Aquarium's General Curator, Jack Cover:**

*"Cownose rays play a part in the ecology of the Bay, and it's a real danger to over-fish them. When you start taking out numbers of these types of animals... you really put the population in jeopardy."<sup>2</sup>*

### **Urge the Maryland General Assembly and Governor Hogan to pass the *2017 Prohibition on Cownose Ray Contests* to stop these killing competitions.**

- The legislation will ensure that a person may not sponsor, conduct or participate in any contest, competition, tournament or derby with the objective of catching or killing cownose rays in state waters for prizes or other inducement, or for entertainment.
- More than 145,000 concerned citizens have already signed a petition to stop the contests.
- Through this bill, Maryland will remain a leader in Chesapeake Bay conservation and advocacy for the humane treatment of animals.

**For more information on the bill – and for more information on how you can help – please visit [savetheraysmd.org](http://savetheraysmd.org).**

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*Save the Cownose Rays Coalition is a grassroots coalition of non-profit organizations working to ban inhumane contests that target the cownose rays of the Chesapeake Bay.*

Questions? Contact us: [info@savetheraysmd.org](mailto:info@savetheraysmd.org)

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.nature.com/articles/srep20970>

<sup>2</sup> <http://foxbaltimore.com/news/local/animal-rights-groups-call-on-lawmakers-to-end-cownose-ray-hunts>

