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For Immediate Release

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Maryland Halts Cownose Ray Killing Contests

Moratorium declared while state prepares fisheries management plan

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (May 4, 2017) – Gov. Larry Hogan signed [HB 211 / SB 268](#) into law today, an emergency bill that will stop contests that target cownose rays, including pregnant rays and their pups. During the contests, participants compete for prize money by slaughtering rays *en masse* to see who can kill the heaviest rays. Videos of the contests show participants dumping rays' bodies back into the Bay or tossing them into dumpsters.

“Maryland’s wildlife is far too precious to be brutally killed and left to rot,” said Mary Finelli, Chair of the Save the Rays Coalition. “We are elated that the state is taking action against these atrocious tournaments to protect these gentle creatures who are native to the Bay.”

The bill declares a moratorium on cownose ray killings contests through July 1, 2019, and requires the Department of Natural Resources to prepare a fisheries management plan for the rays by December 31, 2018. It received strong bipartisan support, with a final vote of 119-21 in the House of Delegates and 44-2 in the Senate.

Advocates say that in addition to protecting cownose rays, whose population is extremely vulnerable to overfishing, the law also stops wanton waste and protects the Bay’s ecosystem.

“We are thrilled that Maryland has put a moratorium on these vile contests where pregnant and newborn rays are shot at point-blank range with arrows,” said Stuart Chaifetz of SHARK. “The video SHARK took of these slaughters broke the hearts of people worldwide and brought massive condemnation upon these senseless competitions. We sincerely thank the people of Maryland and its representatives for standing up and doing the right thing.”

Advocates credit this year’s bill passage to strong support from legislative leaders, particularly Del. Kumar Barve (D-17), Chair of the Environment and Transportation Committee, and Sen. Joan Carter Conway (D-43), Chair of the Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee, along with bill sponsors Del. Shane Robinson (D-39) and Sen. Ron Young (D-3). Advocates also thank the more than 223,000 supporters who signed [a petition](#) to end the contests, and the thousands of concerned citizens who contacted their legislators to ask them to support the bill.

View the [fact sheet](#) and [FAQ](#) for more information.

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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. Coalition partners include: Animal Legal Defense Fund, Center for Biological Diversity, Fish Feel, For All Animals, Last Chance for Animals, Maryland Votes for Animals, Midshore Riverkeeper Conservancy, Sea Shepherd Legal and SHARK (Showing Animals Respect and Kindness).