

Department of Fiscal Services
Maryland General Assembly

FISCAL NOTE
Revised

Senate Bill 317 (Senator Stoltzfus)
Economic and Environmental Affairs

Referred to Environmental Matters

Somerset County - Oysters

This amended bill allows a person to catch oysters with a power dredge in State waters contiguous to Somerset County or in the waters of Tangier Sound. A power dredge license may only be issued to the holder of an oyster harvester license; the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) must suspend the harvester license for the duration of the dredging license.

Power dredging may only occur during the power dredging season from November 1 to March 15, and is prohibited on Saturday or Sunday, or before sunrise or after 3:00 p.m. on any other day.

The bill limits a power dredging licensee to 12 bushels per person, or 24 bushels per boat. Power dredge bars are limited in size to a minimum of 36 inches and a maximum of 42 inches. DNR is authorized to adopt applicable rules and regulations, and may vary the catch limits cited above. The bill also establishes an oyster sanctuary in the area known as Webster Ground where a person may not catch oysters. By January 1, 2001, DNR must recommend if the sanctuary should be continued for another five years. The sanctuary provisions of the bill sunset September 30, 2001.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None. There is no additional license fee and the requirements of this bill could be handled with DNR's existing budgeted resources.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: Potential minimal impact on small businesses as discussed below.

Fiscal Analysis

Small Business Effect: Power dredging was allowed in this area until the authorizing legislation sunset in 1993. During the last oyster season in which power dredging occurred, DNR reports that there were ten individuals who exchanged their oyster harvesting license to obtain the power dredging permit. Although power dredging is perceived to be more efficient than patent tonging, there is no definitive data on the catch rates of the different equipment. Therefore, it is difficult to predict the direct impact on the small businesses engaged in this activity.

The oyster sanctuary is established on a historic oyster bar that is currently nonproductive. To the extent that DNR's planned efforts to repopulate this area are successful, oyster harvesters could benefit if the area is eventually reopened to harvesting.

Information Source(s): Department of Natural Resources, Department of Fiscal Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 7, 1997
nrd Revised - Senate Third Reader - March 17, 1997

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