

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2016 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 1205 (Delegate Jacobs, *et al.*)
Environment and Transportation

Oyster Advisory Commission - Membership and Appointments

This bill alters provisions related to the membership of the Oyster Advisory Commission (OAC) within the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Specifically, the bill establishes that there be one member each of (1) the Senate and the House, appointed by the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House, respectively; (2) the Maryland Watermen’s Association, appointed by the president of the association; (3) the Chesapeake Bay Commercial Fishermen’s Association, appointed by the President of the association; and (4) the Maryland Oystermen Association, appointed by the executive director of the association. In addition to those members, the commission must also consist of 16 members appointed by the Secretary of Natural Resources, 8 of whom who are commercial watermen authorized to catch oysters in the State.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Altering the membership requirements for OAC does not materially affect governmental finances.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law/Background: OAC was established within DNR pursuant to Chapters 113 and 114 of 2007. Under current law, the commission consists of members appointed by the Secretary of Natural Resources. There are currently 21 members. The commission is charged with:

- providing DNR with advice on matters related to oysters;
- reviewing the best possible science and recommending changes to the framework and strategies for rebuilding and managing the oyster population in the Chesapeake Bay;
- reviewing the latest findings relevant to the environmental impact statement evaluating oyster restoration alternatives; and
- reviewing any other scientific, economic, or cultural information relevant to oysters in the Chesapeake Bay.

Chapters 113 and 114 required OAC to report, by December 31, 2007, to the Governor and the General Assembly on a number of items related to oyster disease, oyster sanctuaries, and natural oyster bars. In response to that requirement, the commission produced an interim report and a final report.

In response to the oyster population in the Chesapeake Bay languishing at 1% of historic levels, decreased suitable oyster habitat, and a dwindling number of harvesters, DNR unveiled a new management and restoration plan for oysters and the State's oyster industry in December 2009. The plan increased the State's network of oyster sanctuaries from 9% to 24% of the bay's remaining quality oyster bars, established oyster aquaculture leasing opportunities and related financial assistance programs, and maintained 76% of the bay's remaining quality oyster habitat for a public oyster fishery.

OAC contributed to the development of the 2009 plan and continues to provide advice to DNR regarding rebuilding and managing the oyster population and fishery.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

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

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