



Natural Resources – Fishery Management Plans - Oysters

HB 911 – February 12, 2019 – House Environment and Transportation Committee

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Thank you Chairman Barve, Vice Chair Stein, and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee to allow me to provide this testimony on behalf of the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science (UMCES).

Since its founding in 1925, UMCES has been engaged in science to management programs to meet its legislatively mandated mission to “...develop and apply a predictive ecology for Maryland and her citizens.” Our work spans numerous topics mostly related to the Chesapeake Bay, its watershed and species therein, from the mountains of Western Maryland to the Atlantic Ocean.

Under Chapter 5 of the Laws of the 2020 General Assembly, UMCES has a seat on the Oyster Advisory Commission. The law also states that UMCES is one of the entities with which the Department of Natural Resources will coordinate to develop a package of consensus recommendations for enhancing the fisheries management plan for oysters. Chapter 5 describes a process informed by a science-based modeling tool to quantify the long-term impacts of identified management actions on oyster abundance, habitat, harvest and environmental impacts. UMCES has the experience and capacity of developing that tool.

Based on the experience of UMCES’ scientists, developing fishery management plans through a facilitated process often takes longer than an agency-developed fishery management plan, but has more buy-in from the impacted communities. The role of the scientists in these efforts is to: 1) explain the available data to the stakeholders; 2) develop models with input from the stakeholders to forecast outcomes of management options; and 3) assist in interpreting results.

In this case, time is needed to allow for the interactions between the Oyster Advisory Commission members to develop potential management scenarios for scientists who would then use models to develop and present the likely outcomes back the Commission for review and consideration. This iterative process takes time.

*Therefore, UMCES seeks an amendment to the proposed legislation to add additional interim reporting and that the **Final Report due date be changed from July 1, 2021 to December 1, 2021.** In addition, we also understand the need for open meetings in this process.*

UMCES supports HB 911 with the amendment described above and urges the Committee’s favorable report with amendments.