

Tuesday, March 1, 2022

TO: Paul Pinsky, Chair of Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee; Guy Guzzone, Chair of Budget and Taxation Committee and Committee Members

FROM: Mark Bryer, The Nature Conservancy, Chesapeake Bay Program Director; and Michelle Dietz, The Nature Conservancy, Director of Government Relations

POSITION: Support SB 830 - Oysters – Spat, Shells, and Substrate

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) supports SB 830 offered by Senator Elfreth, and commends Senators Bailey, Eckardt, Guzzone, and Hershey for cosponsoring this legislation. For the past two decades, the world has looked to the Chesapeake Bay to learn what's possible in oyster restoration. No effort in the world matches the scale of what has been accomplished here, and TNC has been proud to support and invest in oyster restoration along with many others during this time. But it has become clear that lacking substrate is significantly limiting additional oyster expansion across the Chesapeake Bay. Without more substrate – be it shell, rock, concrete or other hard surface where oysters can grow – we collectively cannot increase the number of oysters in the Bay and realize the associated, and much needed, benefits for the Bay's health, our state and local economies and Maryland's culture.

SB 830 makes a number of important advancements to increase substrate for oysters. Critically, it invests in science that will both better define substrate's current state in Maryland's portion of the Chesapeake Bay and better study how different types of substrate perform ecologically and economically. SB 830 further requires that the Department of Natural Resources develop a long-term plan for substrate needs and acquisition based on this updated science. SB 830 also makes other important investments, including establishing a new grant program to encourage shell recycling and expanding oyster hatcheries as well as seafood processing facilities.

Oysters are a critical form of natural infrastructure in Maryland, and substrate is the literal foundation for their restoration. Rebuilding lost infrastructure requires solid information, a plan, and significant capital investments. SB 830 makes important advances in each of these areas, and reflects a positive step forward in the long road to restoring oysters to the Chesapeake.

Therefore, we urge a favorable report on SB 830.