



Testimony in SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS of House Bill 293 – State Boat Act – Abandoned or Sunken Recreational Vessels – Identification and Removal

Environment and Transportation Committee

February 14, 2024

Dear Chair Korman and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in **SUPPORT OF HB293 with amendments**, on behalf of Arundel Rivers Federation. Arundel Rivers is a non-profit organization dedicated to the protection, preservation, and restoration of the South, West and Rhode Rivers with over 3,500 supporters. Our mission is to work with local communities to achieve clean, fishable, and swimmable waterways for present and future generations.

House Bill 293 will provide a much-needed update to existing abandoned or sunken vessel law by (1) adding abandoned anchored and abandoned moored vessels without owner consent after a certain period of time to the definition of abandoned or sunken vessel, and (2) adding certain criteria for the purposes of determining whether a recreation vessel meets the criteria for an abandoned or sunken vessel.

As South, West, and Rhode Riverkeeper, I often receive reports from concerned citizens about abandoned or sunken vessels within our local waterways. The process of having those vessels addressed or removed by the Department has been frustrating, lengthy, and often non-successful despite the vessel clearly being an environmental hazard, derelict, and abandoned. In one particular example, I was contacted on my *first day* on the job as the South, West, and Rhode Riverkeeper in October 2023 about an anchored partially sunken vessel on the South River that was presenting environmental hazard concerns. Despite my efforts to also reach out to the Department of Natural Resources, Natural Resource Police, and even elected officials, it took 11 months and private donations to eventually have the vessel removed. Most reports of abandoned or sunken vessels that I receive are of anchored or moored vessels, not of vessels abandoned on docks, at marinas, or found adrift.

Arundel Rivers suggests adding an environmental hazard amendment to (K), the criteria list for determining whether a recreational vessel is considered abandoned or sunken. Abandoned or sunken vessels may not only be navigational hazards, but may present environmental hazards as well if they are leaking fuel, oil, sewage, or other containments. Additionally, the vessel may negatively impact aquatic or tidal habitats. Suggested amendment language:

(6) IF THE VESSEL PRESENTS A POTENTIAL HEALTH OR ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARD.

Abandoned and sunken vessels present navigational and environmental hazards, and the current protocols and regulations are simply not sufficient in addressing all potentially abandoned or sunken vessels. Arundel Rivers Federation strongly supports any effort to better protect our waterways. HB293 will give more tools to the Department to adequately assess sunken and abandoned vessels and we respectfully request a **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS REPORT on HB293**.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elle Bassett".

Elle Bassett
South, West and Rhode Riverkeeper
Arundel Rivers Federation