



Wes Moore, Governor
Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor
Josh Kurtz, Secretary
David Goshorn, Deputy Secretary

April 3, 2024

BILL NUMBER: Senate Bill 674 - Third Reader

SHORT TITLE: Abandoned or Sunken Vessels and Waterway Improvement Fund Grants

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: SUPPORT

EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT'S POSITION

The Department supports Senate Bill 674 as amended. The Department shares the concern addressed in this bill, as abandoned and sunken vessels often present environmental and navigational hazards which can be avoided or mitigated by the measures proposed in the bill. The Department has worked with the sponsor to incorporate amendments to the initial bill text concerning the vessel turn-in program, which would allow qualifying vessel owners with unwanted vessels to be proactive in the disposal of those vessels, before they become at risk of sinking or becoming abandoned. The amended language permits the disposal of identified vessels while they are still in a condition to safely tow, reducing costs and allowing for more participation for the same funding commitment. The bill also establishes criteria for use by the Department in prioritizing vessel removal if annual costs for removal exceed available funding or staff resources. The Department also supports amended language that would add a provision for notifying vessel owners of the Department's interest in pursuing removal of an apparently abandoned vessel by attaching a sticker declaring such intent by affixing a sticker to the vessel, when other methods of identifying and/or contacting the owner have failed. .

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

NR § 8-721 which provides statutory processes for the notifications to owners of abandoned and sunken vessels, as well as for their subsequent removal and disposal was last modified in the 2020 session of the Maryland General Assembly (CH 75/CH 76). There is no previous legislative history for a voluntary vessel turn-in program.

BILL EXPLANATION

Senate Bill 674 requires vessel owners to provide emergency contact information to the Department. Senate Bill 674 also modernizes methods of notification for individual vessel owners and the general public when the Department intends to take action to dispose of abandoned and sunken vessels. The bill also establishes a new voluntary vessel turn-in program, whereby qualifying owners can relinquish their unwanted vessels for purposes of disposal.

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