



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

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February 20, 2024

**BILL NUMBER: Senate Bill 674 - First Reader**

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

**DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT**

**EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT'S POSITION**

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The Department supports Senate Bill 674 with the proposed amendments. 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 offers amendments to the current 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 proposed amendment would permit 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 proposed amendment would also establish criteria for use by the Department in prioritizing vessel removal if annual costs for removal exceed available funding or staff resources.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

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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**

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Senate Bill 674 requires vessel owners to provide emergency contact information to the Department. SB 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.

Contact: Dylan Behler, Director, Legislative and Constituent Services  
dylan.behler@maryland.gov ♦ 410-260-8113 (office) ♦ 443-924-0891 (cell)

BY:

(To be offered in the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee)

AMENDMENT TO SENATE BILL 674

(First Reading File Bill)

AMENDMENT NO. 1

On page 6, strike beginning with “DETERMINED” in line 28 down through “SUBTITLE,” in line 30.

On page 7, in line 4, after “VESSEL;” insert “AND”; in line 5, strike “STATE; AND” and substitute “STATE.”; strike in their entirety lines 6 through 7, inclusive; and strike beginning with “THE” in line 8 down through “MOORING” in line 19 and substitute:

“IN EVALUATING WHETHER A VESSEL IS ELIGIBLE FOR THE PROGRAM, THE DEPARTMENT SHALL CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING CIRCUMSTANCES, IN ORDER OF PRIORITY:

(1) A VESSEL THAT IS ABANDONED OR SUNKEN AS DEFINED IN § 8-721 OF THIS SUBTITLE;

(2) SUBJECT TO THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA, A VESSEL THAT IS AT RISK OF BECOMING ABANDONED OR SUNKEN:

(i) THE VESSEL IS TAKING ON OR HAS TAKEN ON WATER WITHOUT AN EFFECTIVE MEANS TO DRAIN OR EMPTY THE WATER;

(ii) SPACES ON THE VESSELS THAT ARE DESIGNED TO BE ENCLOSED ARE INCAPABLE OF BEING SEALED OFF OR REMAIN OPEN TO THE ELEMENTS FOR EXTENDED PERIODS OF TIME; OR

(iii) THE VESSEL HAS BROKEN FROM OR IS IN DANGER OF BREAKING LOOSE FROM ITS ANCHOR; AND

(3) ANY OTHER VESSEL THE DEPARTMENT DETERMINES IS ELIGIBLE FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE PROGRAM”.