



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

February 21, 2024

BILL NUMBER: House Bill 613 – First Reader

SHORT TITLE: Natural Resources - Recreational Catching of Oysters or Clams - Requirements

DEPARTMENT’S POSITION: SUPPORT

EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT’S POSITION

The Department supports House Bill 613.

Currently, Maryland does not have a recreational oyster license. Because of this, the State is unable to ascertain how much recreational harvest is occurring.

This license would assist the Agency in determining the recreational oyster harvest and how that may or may not impact the overall oyster abundance in the State. This license would allow the department to contact individuals with a recreational oyster license to provide them with the Shellfish Closure Book so that individuals would know where oyster harvesting is not allowed. These areas would include poor water quality areas closed by the Department of the Environment where harvested oysters are unsafe to consume, oyster sanctuaries, areas requested to be closed by the commercial public oyster fishery, and other areas that have been closed to harvesting,

Under the Agency’s current regulatory authority, it can create a free registration but not a license. Other states offer recreational licenses. For example, New Jersey offers a recreational shellfish license of \$10 annually, and the Agency feels this is a fair cost for the amount of harvest a recreational user is allotted. A portion of the license cost will go towards replenishing public fishery oyster bars by planting shell and juvenile oysters, similarly to the \$300 oyster surcharge commercially licensed oyster harvesters are required to purchase annually and is used for replenishment plantings. Recreational users (only Maryland residents may harvest) can catch up to 100 oysters per day. Having such a license will ensure that the Agency has a full understanding of those that partake in this means of harvest, the impact that it has on the resource, and provide information to assist the department when annually setting recreational harvest limits.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

No similar bills have been proposed previously. Recreational harvest is regulated by season, times, size, and catch limit. No recreational oyster license currently exists.

BILL EXPLANATION

The bill would create a \$10 annual 365 day recreational oystering license for residents who are 16 and older. Individuals under 16 years of age would be exempt from needing a license.

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