



# CHESAPEAKE BAY COMMISSION

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## Testimony

Bill Number/Title: SB 629 / Natural Resources – SAV Protection Zones and Hydraulic Clam Dredges (Aquatic Habitat Protection Act)  
Committee: Education, Health and Environmental Affairs  
Hearing: February 25, 2020  
Position: Support

## Background

The Chesapeake Bay Commission is a tri-state legislative commission created by law in Maryland, Pennsylvania and Virginia to advise the members of the three general assemblies on matters of watershed-wide concern. Its fundamental purpose is to assist each assembly to develop legislation and policies that foster the collaborative and practical restoration of the Chesapeake Bay and its watershed.

The Commission is a full partner in the Chesapeake Bay Program Partnership, the joint federal-state effort that leads restoration work and has been a signatory to each Watershed Agreement. Additionally, the Commission has a long history of engagement on policy issues related to the conservation of the Bay's aquatic resources

## Position

The Commission supports SB 629. Underwater grass beds are critical to the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem. They provide food and shelter to fish and wildlife, sequester carbon, add oxygen to the water, absorb nutrient pollution, reduce shoreline erosion and help suspended particles of sediment settle to the bottom

Submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) is specially identified as a targeted outcome by the 2014 Chesapeake Watershed Agreement. The exact text is as follows:

Sustain and increase the habitat benefits of SAV (underwater grasses) in the Chesapeake Bay. Achieve and sustain the ultimate outcome of 185,000 acres of SAV Bay-wide necessary for a restored Bay. Progress toward this ultimate outcome will be measured against a target of 90,000 acres by 2017 and 130,000 acres by 2025.

It is estimated SAV acreage in the Bay was 109,000 acres in 2018, 59% of the partnership's long-term goal.

Impacts that can have negative impacts on SAV beds need to be reduced if we are to achieve our goal. The currently law does not adequately address the ability to SAV to establish new areas quickly, hence the benefit of annual updates to the SAV Protection Zones. Additionally, short-term environmental impacts can cause SAV beds to disappear, but their presence indicates habitat with high potential for permanent establishment. Hence the benefits of the five-year look-back. The buffer provision would also encourage the growth and expansion of SAV beds.