



Larry Hogan, Governor
Boyd Rutherford, Lt. Governor
Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio, Secretary
Charles Glass, Deputy Secretary

February 25, 2020

The Honorable Paul G. Pinsky
Chair, Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Cheryl C. Kagan
Vice Chair, Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Letter of Opposition – Senate Bill 948 - Natural Resources – Commercial Oyster Authorizations – Requirements

Dear Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources opposes Senate Bill 948.

The bill would stop entry into the commercial oyster fishery, while retiring any unused licenses. The result will be the end of the Maryland oyster fishery as harvesters age, leave, or are otherwise unable to pay their surcharge, reducing and eventually removing economic activity in the State through loss of dockside value and flow of that money through the economy. The eventual repercussion of the bill would be to eliminate any oyster authorization not remaining active.

This bill flies directly in the face of not only the latest science on Maryland's oyster fishery, but also the work currently being done by the Oyster Advisory Commission under Senate Bill 830 from the 2019 General Assembly Session. Senate Bill 948 does not allow that commission to discuss the commercial fishery much less allow it to provide consensus recommendations to guide the fishery's sustainable future.

By removing the oyster fishery over time as the fishery ages or otherwise does not renew licenses, the department will have less resources to invest in restoration activities related to the fishery. This will have further negative impacts on the resource. The elimination of a popular fishery will also put pressure on other species, as commercial watermen shift to other fisheries such as crabs to maintain a living.

Finally, Senate Bill 948 makes an inequitable and arbitrary decision as to which harvesters may stay in the fishery without regard to biology, management, or the fishery as a whole. The department does not support rash decision making when limiting a fishery. Science should guide any consideration of closures. The University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science has established the guard rails on the fishery through the stock assessment, which should guide decisions such as this one.

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The department has always had interactive dialogue with its fishery stakeholders and considered all relevant input both scientific and economic when considering how to limit a commercial fishery. Regulatory means by the department to limit effort have been successfully implemented in many other fisheries managed by the department. In the oyster fishery alone, the department limited effort in the 2019-2020 season through bushel limits and a mandatory day off. Even the commercial oyster market self-regulates effort, as this year the oyster market started strong but there have been over 20 days when no processors were buying because market demand had been met.

For the above reasons, the department respectfully asks the Committee for an unfavorable report for Senate Bill 948.

Respectfully submitted,
James W. McKittrick
Director, Legislative and Constituent Services

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