
Committee: House Environment and Transportation
Legislation: HB0143
Position: FAVORABLE
Date: February 12, 2020

Dear Chairman Barve and Members of the Committee:

The Arundel Rivers Federation requests a favorable report for HB 143, which will protect our marine environment and reduce risks to navigation in the State's waterways.

Introduction

As a Riverkeeper, part of my job is patrolling the rivers I am responsible for advocating on behalf of for violations of environmental law. Over the course of the past 5 years, I have identified many abandoned vessels in the South River and brought them to the attention of the Department of Natural Resources. In many of these instances, removal of the vessel takes several months, and in the interim, pieces of the vessels detach and float into navigable channels, engine oil, fuel and other chemicals leak into the marine environment, and costs of removal escalate as the vessel sinks into river bottom. House Bill 143 will remove existing bureaucratic hurdles that delay DNR's response to hazardous abandoned vessels and thus mitigate the damage and risk posed by such vessels.

Harm to Sea Life

Boats have many fluids, fuels, solvents, and other chemicals in them, and when they sink these pollutants can enter the marine environment. In the case of petroleum products, oil destroys the ability of marine mammals to insulate their bodies and the ability of birds to repel water from their feathers, which can cause them to freeze to death.¹ Fish exposed to petroleum may have reduced growth, fin erosion, reproductive impairment, and diminished egg and larval survival.²

Many times, an abandoned boat foundering in the waters of the bay is avoidable, if corrective measures are taken in a timely way. Currently, the Department of Natural resources ("DNR") is constrained to wait for extended periods (90 days) before it may act to remove a vessel that is poised to sink.

Hazards to Navigation

On top of the risk to marine life, mariners on the Bay are at risk of collision with submerged or partially submerged vessels and pieces of such vessels. Such collisions invariably cost money for repair to the operational vessel, and can cause personal injury and death, especially in winter months. Any inconvenience suffered by derelict vessel owners is outweighed by damage to property and potential risk of injury or death from a boating accident. House Bill 143 helps alleviate those risks and properly enables DNR to take rapid response measures if such a risk is posed.

¹ <https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/oilimpacts.html>

² *Id*

Conclusion

Abandoned boats are dangerous to marine and human life, and have been on the rise recently.³ This bill is a timely step in the right direction to protect our invaluable Bay environment, and preserve the life, limb, and property of our State's citizens. Arundel Rivers Federation urges a favorable report.

Respectfully submitted,



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³ <https://chesapeakebaymagazine.com/abandoned-boat-cases-surge-in-2019/>