

Brian Russell, President  
Southern Maryland Shellfish Growers Association  
45725 Stoney Run Drive  
Great Mills, MD 20634

February 7, 2021

To: Members of the Senate Environment and Transportation Committee

Re: SB203 Aquaculture Lease Applications - Notices, Protests, Meetings, and Conflict Resolution

SMSGGA Position: Oppose SB203

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Dear Chairman Pinsky, Vice Chair Nathan-Pulliam, and members of the committee

My name is Brian Russell, one of the four owners and operators of Shore Thing Shellfish, a small oyster farm in Tall Timbers, and also the President of the Southern Maryland Growers Association (SMSGGA). The SMSGGA represents about 25 small business oyster farms located in Anne Arundel, Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary's Counties. We oppose SB 203 Aquaculture Lease Applications- Notices, Protest, Meetings, and Conflict Resolution.

SB 203 states that "The Department Shall: Work with the petitioner and applicant to mitigate concerns raised in the petition." This suggests that a petitioner could indefinitely hold up a lease application with their concerns. This does not seem to be a fair approach to the process. The Department of Natural Resources and the Army Corp of Engineers already work very hard to take into consideration all user groups while at the same time working to move this fledgling industry forward. They currently mediate and make sure proposed leases are not impeding on navigation or other commercial fisheries. The DNR is currently working to help open the lines of communication between all user groups which will alleviate much of the major opposition from all other user groups.

There is no argument that the Chesapeake Bay is an invaluable resource to all who work on, and live around, it. Oyster aquaculture is helping to restore this resource. Oyster farms do more good for the bay than the home owner living on the water. Our oysters are constantly removing the excess nutrients that run off of many of these waterfront properties. They also provide excellent habitat and nursery for many species of fish and crabs. Some of the best fishing can be found around oyster leases. If a lease goes in front of a property, the landowner should consider themselves lucky to have their own bay cleaning service right off their dock.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter and we ask that you give SB 203 an unfavorable report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brian Russell". The signature is fluid and connected, with the first name "Brian" and the last name "Russell" written in a single continuous stroke.

Brian Russell