



Chesapeake
OYSTER ALLIANCE
10 Billion for the Bay

ANNAPOLIS AQUACULTURE - ARUNDEL RIVERS FEDERATION - BIG ISLAND AQUACULTURE - BLUE OYSTER ENVIRONMENTAL - CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION - CHESSIE SEAFOOD - COASTAL CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION MARYLAND - FRIENDS OF ST. CLEMENTS BAY - FRIENDS OF THE WICOMICO RIVER - GROW OYSTER REEFS - HOLLYWOOD OYSTER CO. - HOOPERS ISLAND OYSTER CO. - LAMBERT SHELLFISH - LYNNHAVEN RIVER NOW - ORCHARD POINT OYSTERS - OYSTER COMPANY OF VIRGINIA - OYSTER NINJA/S.S. SHUCKING - SHORE THING SHELLFISH - SHORERIVERS - ST. MARY'S RIVER WATERSHED ASSOCIATION - TIDEWATER OYSTER GARDENERS ASSOCIATION - VIRGINIA WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY - WARD OYSTER

House Bill 799

Aquaculture Leases and Shellfish Nursery Operations - Wetlands

DATE: February 17, 2021

POSITION: **SUPPORT**

The Chesapeake Oyster Alliance is a broad coalition of non-profits, community organizations, oyster growers, and business owners with the shared goal of adding 10 billion oysters in the Bay by the year 2025. With a focus on oyster restoration, science-based fishery management, and increased aquaculture, the Chesapeake Oyster Alliance aims to accelerate oyster recovery efforts and in so doing the recovery of the Chesapeake Bay.

The Chesapeake Oyster Alliance strongly supports House Bill 799 and respectfully requests a favorable report from the House Environment and Transportation Committee.

In 2010, the Maryland Legislature revised our fisheries laws to encourage aquaculture operations to broaden their businesses and increase the harvest of oysters. The most dynamic of these new businesses were those that chose water column leases for their concentrated focus on selling into the lucrative restaurant industry. Sales increased quickly for these oysters which require special equipment and sorting methods to produce consistent and attractive oysters for serving on the half shell market. For these efforts, their oysters typically sell for 3 to 10 times the price for wild or bottom grown oysters.

These businesses invested their capital on the gear required to handle these oysters and each of the growers, based on their unique leases and facilities, honed their operations to minimize labor and equipment costs. These oyster growers have to manage their stock of oysters and one aspect is to periodically run their oysters through a piece of equipment called a tumbler two or three times before they are harvested so that their shells have the fast growth, sharp shell chipped off encouraging the oysters to develop a deep cup favored by restaurants. The tumbler rinses the oysters at the same time to remove algal growth and then can help sort the batch of oysters by size before replacing them in the water for more grow out.

In 2019, this body unanimously passed HB 28/SB 939 to allow oyster growers to operate oyster nursery equipment on their docks, recognizing that it presented no impairment to water quality and likely resulted in improved water quality. This action placed oversight of these nursery operations under the Department of Natural Resources, the agency that oversees permitting of aquaculture operations.

HB 799 builds upon this action by allowing aquaculture leaseholders to place equipment used in their oyster growing operations on their docks. This will allow them to increase the safety of their workers handling these cages of oysters and minimize the cost of labor from removing them from the dock to handle them at the tumbler and then replace them back out to the boat for deployment on their lease. The requirement that the activity

associated with this equipment be related to a lease minimizes any risk of this policy being abused by those other than oyster growers.

For these reasons, the Chesapeake Oyster Alliance respectfully recommends a favorable report on House Bill 799 from the Environment and Transportation Committee. Please contact David Sikorski (david@ccamd.org; (443) 621-9186) with any questions.