



Chesapeake
OYSTER ALLIANCE
10 Billion for the Bay

ANNAPOLIS AQUACULTURE – ARUNDEL RIVERS FEDERATION – CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION
CHESAPEAKE BEACH OYSTER CULTIVATION SOCIETY – COASTAL CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION MARYLAND
DOWNTOWN SAILING CENTER – FRIENDS OF ST. CLEMENTS BAY – LIVING CLASSROOMS FOUNDATION
MARK STREET VENTURES, LLC – ORCHARD POINT OYSTER COMPANY – PIRATES COVE OYSTER COMPANY – SHORERIVERS
ST. MARY’S RIVER WATERSHED ASSOCIATION – TRUE CHESAPEAKE OYSTER COMPANY, LLC
WATERFRONT PARTNERSHIP OF BALTIMORE

House Bill 945

Tidal Fish Licenses – Oyster Authorizations - Reinstatement

DATE: March 3, 2023

POSITION: **OPPOSE**

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.

We, the above-listed members of the Chesapeake Oyster Alliance, **strongly OPPOSE House Bill 945** and **recommend an UNFAVORABLE report** from the House Environment and Transportation Committee. This bill would weaken deterrents for oyster poaching and allow reinstatement of a revoked license after five years.

In its 2009 report, the Maryland Oyster Advisory Commission stated, “*there is no single factor more important to the future of ecologic restoration and aquaculture than to address and dramatically reduce ongoing illegal oyster harvesting activities.*” Oyster poaching is a significant impediment to oyster recovery. Over the past 5 years, there have been nearly 90 citations issued for oystering in sanctuaries, which represents a fraction of poachers who were caught.

Currently, there are five oyster poaching violations that can trigger revocation of an oyster authorization. These include harvesting oysters inside a sanctuary, removing oysters from an aquaculture lease, harvesting oysters in areas closed for water quality issues, harvesting out of permitted times, and harvesting with a gear type that is not permitted. These are egregious violations that threaten the viability of the industry, the recovery of the oyster population, and the health and safety of Maryland citizens. The statutory requirement that an individual’s authorization to catch oysters be revoked if they are found guilty of one of these five violations reflects the seriousness of these actions and are intended to serve as a strong deterrent to those who would consider skirting these regulations for monetary gain.

The 2018 oyster stock assessment for Maryland determined that adult oyster populations fell more than 50% between 1999 and 2018, and that 53% of Maryland’s oyster harvest areas are overfished. Since then, the Department of Natural Resources has adjusted fishing regulations in an attempt to address this chronic issue. Those who poach oyster undermine the efforts to remedy overfishing, weaken oyster recovery and threaten the future of the oyster industry. Weakening oyster poaching is a detriment to the honest efforts of watermen who comply with harvest regulations.

The Chesapeake Oyster Alliance respectfully requests an **unfavorable** report on House Bill 945. Please contact tcouncil@cbf.org with any questions.