



*Wes Moore, Governor
Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor
Josh Kurtz, Secretary
David Goshorn, Deputy Secretary*

Date: **February 4, 2025**

BILL NUMBER: **Senate Bill 301**

SHORT TITLE: **Removal and Storage of Abandoned or Sunken Vessels - Funding**

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: **OPPOSE**

EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT'S POSITION

The proposed legislation raises significant fiscal and operational concerns for the Natural Resources Police (NRP). As written, the NRP could be required to allocate resources toward removing abandoned vessels despite the lack of designated funding for such operations. This could strain existing resources, potentially impacting staffing levels and core operational priorities.

Under the current legislative framework, the NRP has effectively met its operational needs, upheld public safety, ensured waterway security, and addressed environmental concerns without diverting operational funds for vessel removal. The existing structure allows the NRP to focus on its primary responsibilities without compromising essential functions.

Furthermore, authorizing operational funds for abandoned vessel removal would increase overall costs, necessitating additional funding to sustain current service levels and operational efficiency. This shift could disrupt critical law enforcement and public safety efforts without a dedicated funding source.

The Department does appreciate the conversations that we have had with the sponsor with regard to abandoned vessels and this bill, and should there be an amendment to ensure that the Natural Resources Police budget is not impacted, we would remove our opposition to the legislation.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Fishing and Boating Services - Hydrographic Services manages the removal of 30-50 abandoned vessels annually, with costs ranging from \$350,000 to \$550,000 annually. These expenses are funded exclusively through Waterway Improvement Funds designated for this purpose. However, Hydro has removed up to 70 vessels in some years. In most cases, Waterway Improvement Funds cannot be used to remove vessels from private property or piers.

The proposed change in language introduces uncertainty regarding the potential reallocation of these costs to the Natural Resources Police (NRP) operational budget, raising concerns about the financial and operational impact on NRP resources.

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BILL EXPLANATION

This bill authorizes the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to use funds allocated for the Natural Resources Police (NRP) to remove or store abandoned or sunken vessels. Under existing law, NRP operational funds are restricted and cannot be used for abandoned vessel removal or storage.