



Waterman's Association of Worcester County

10448 Azalea Rd

Berlin, MD 21811

February 9, 2025

The Honorable Brian Feldman

Chair, Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

The Honorable Cheryl Kagan

Vice Chair, Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

2 West Miller Senate Office Building

11 Bladen Street

Annapolis, MD 21401

Subject: Strong Opposition to Bill 428 – Chesapeake Bay Legacy Act

Dear Chair Feldman and Vice Chair Kagan,

The Waterman's Association of Worcester County writes to express our strong and unequivocal opposition to Bill 428, concerning new fisheries management plans. After careful review and consideration, we believe that Bill 428, in its current form, will have detrimental and far-reaching impacts on the livelihood of our members, our community, local consumers and the health of our local fisheries. This letter expresses our serious concerns regarding Bill 428 and its potential impact on fisheries management within the state. While we understand and appreciate the intent behind the bill to ensure healthy and sustainable fisheries, we believe that its current form is overly broad and counterproductive to achieving its intended goals.

There is a complete absence of meaningful participation and input from the fishing community in the development of this bill. We, the watermen who work these waters daily and have generations of experience and knowledge, were not consulted at any point in the process. There has been no outreach or substantive discussion with our association regarding Bill 428 with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Our members possess critical expertise and insights that are essential to the responsible management of our natural resources. To proceed with this legislation without their input demonstrates a serious lack of due diligence.

We contend that Bill 428 is too large and encompassing in its scope. The bill attempts to manage three distinct and diverse ecosystems – the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries, the Coastal bays and their tributaries, and the Atlantic Ocean – under a single framework. Each of these ecosystems presents unique challenges and requires tailored management strategies based on scientific data and local knowledge. Attempting to manage them collectively under a uniform approach is unlikely to be effective and could potentially harm each individual ecosystem and its respective fisheries.

Furthermore, the bill suffers from a significant lack of clarity regarding its implementation process. Without a clear roadmap for how these regulations will be enforced, how data will be collected, and how its success will be measured, we fear that Bill 428 will create unnecessary confusion, redundancy and uncertainty for all involved. Furthermore, many of the species listed within Bill 428 are already co-managed effectively through the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC). Bill 428 states that the state could create fisheries management plans that are more restrictive than both ASMFC and MAFMC plans. In many cases, this is unnecessary and could create conflicting regulations, adding confusion and burden to all fishermen. This undermines the cooperative efforts currently in place and potentially jeopardizes regional fishery management plans.

A large missing part of Bill 428 is its failure to include a scoping and public comment period for all management plans developed under its authority. Best management practices dictate that any regulations impacting our natural resources must be subject to thorough public scrutiny and informed by scientific data and local expertise. The omission of this crucial step is a grave oversight that could lead to unintended consequences. Bill 428 mentions an “appropriate advisory board” several times. Yet there are no criteria on who will make up this board or how the board will make decisions.

Moreover, the bill lacks a clear mandate for the representation of a variety of stakeholders in the development and implementation of any management plans. Meaningful and sustainable resource management requires the collaboration of all interested parties, including fishermen, scientists, environmental organizations, and local communities. Failing to ensure this broad representation will only serve to polarize the debate and undermine the long-term success of any management efforts.

We are particularly concerned about the sections of the bill that contradict its stated intention to avoid duplication of regulatory efforts and unnecessary costs to the state. By potentially creating a parallel management structure for species already effectively managed by ASMFC and MAFMC, Bill 428 effectively does both.

For these compelling reasons, the Waterman's Association of Worcester County urges you to reconsider Bill 428. We believe it requires significant revision to address the serious deficiencies outlined above and to ensure that any future legislation concerning the management of our natural resources is grounded in collaboration, transparency, and sound science.

Sincerely,

Earl R Gwin, Jr

President