



Chesapeake
OYSTER ALLIANCE
10 Billion for the Bay

ADVOCATES FOR HERRING BAY | CAPE CONSERVATION CORPS | CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION
CHESAPEAKE BEACH OYSTER CULTIVATION SOCIETY | LIVING CLASSROOMS FOUNDATION
MAGOTHY RIVER ASSOCIATION | MARK STREET VENTURES | PHILLIPS WHARF ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER
SEVERN RIVER ASSOCIATION | SHORE RIVERS | SHORE THING SHELLFISH | SOLAR OYSTERS
ST. MARY'S RIVER WATERSHED ASSOCIATION | TRUE CHESAPEAKE OYSTER COMPANY

House Bill 893

Tidal Fish Licenses - Oyster Authorizations - Administrative Penalties

DATE: February 17, 2025

POSITION: **OPPOSE**

The Chesapeake Oyster Alliance is a broad coalition consisting of 113 partners, including non-profits, academic institutions, oyster aquaculture operations and other businesses with a shared goal of adding 10 billion oysters to the Bay. With a focus on oyster restoration, science-based fishery management, and increasing aquaculture, the Chesapeake Oyster Alliance aims to accelerate oyster recovery efforts and in so doing the recovery of Chesapeake Bay at-large

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 more than 90 citations issued for oystering in sanctuaries, which represents a fraction of poachers who were caught. 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.

We, the above-listed members of the Chesapeake Oyster Alliance, **OPPOSE House Bill 893** which would weaken deterrents for oyster poaching penalties and undermine oyster recovery.

HB 893 would eliminate the Department of Natural Resources’ most potent deterrent – revocations – by bringing penalties down to a 2-year suspension for a single violation, and up to 10 years for two or more violations. It would also allow for reinstatement of authorizations for individuals currently revoked whose revocation thus far has exceeded the proposed suspensions in the bill.

Those who poach oysters 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. As of February 2024, there were only 5 active suspensions and 59 revocations, involving a total of 64 citizens. On average individuals with a revoked license have been found guilty of 13 DNR violations, including fishery violations not just of oysters, but clam, striped bass, blue crab, on top of a range of other non-fishery charges, including hunting violations and poaching of deer. Application of the current penalties serves to remove the most serious ‘bad actors’ from the fishery and protects the investments of all Marylander’s and the lease rights of all working people on the water

The Chesapeake Oyster Alliance respectfully requests an **unfavorable on House Bill 893**. Please contact Chesapeake Oyster Alliance Senior Manager, Tanner Council (tcouncil@cbf.org; 434.882.8266) with any questions.