University of Maryland
CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE

SENATE EDUCATION, ENERGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
Senate Bill 875
Oysters - Rotational Harvest - Pilot Programs
March 10, 2026
Information

Chair Feldman and Vice Chair Kagan and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer written testimony on Senate Bill 875. The bill establishes a five-year rotational harvest pilot program for oysters, implemented by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in four specified rotational harvest areas in the Chesapeake Bay.

The University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science (UMCES) is one of twelve institutions within the University System of Maryland. UMCES as multiple environmental research laboratories across the State and administers the Maryland Sea Grant College. A core mission of UMCES is to provide the science for decision-making for the betterment of Maryland's environment and her citizens related to Chesapeake Bay and beyond. UMCES has four research laboratories across the State as well as the Integration and Application Network and administers Maryland Sea Grant.

UMCES is providing the following information on this bill that we hope would be considered during the bill's deliberation. UMCES has particular scientific expertise in oyster monitoring and research within the Chesapeake Bay and beyond.

Beyond the data collection outlined in the bill, a rigorous research study should be completed on these pilot sites ***with control sites*** to develop long-term policy recommendations. This research study should help address comparisons to look at whether rotational harvest results in higher catches than leaving an area open. A second useful comparison would be how many oysters are there under each approach. Lastly, being able to monitor the oyster bar to determine if it is stable, growing, or shrinking would be important.

- It is important that stakeholders (fishermen, advocates, and DNR) be included at the beginning, middle and end so they understand the research program, provide valuable advice to set up the rotations. Professional facilitation would be highly encouraged.
- A 7-10 year study is likely needed to account for planting and harvesting multiple times at each site, which is necessary to get a sense of strategy's sustainability (stable, growing, shirking abundances). Additionally, it will also allow for some variation in spatfall, which is likely to happen over space and time and is the driver of oyster reef/population growth.
- The monitoring should involve annual monitoring of the oyster bar and catch for several rotational bars and bars that are open to harvest without rotation that can function as control sites.
- The monitoring could be done by patent tong or dredge, also preferably paired with sonar bottom mapping. Given some time, the question of number of bars and amount of time

needed between rotations could be more formally addressed with small simulation studies.

- Catch and effort for each rotation area and comparison bar would need to be monitored. Obtaining catch and effort associated with specific management areas can be a challenge.
- It would be helpful to the scientific community to monitor biodiversity associated with always-open and rotated oyster bars during the pilot study.

UMCES appreciates your continued leadership in strengthening Maryland's oyster population and fishery.