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ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY RESOURCES

RE: SB 688 – Environment – Stream and Floodplain Restoration Projects – Requirements and Limitations – UNFAVORABLE

Environmental Quality Resources, LLC (EQR) is a family-owned, Anne Arundel-based, business that has been restoring the watersheds of the Chesapeake Bay since 1991. Since our founding EQR has employed more than 3000 of your neighbors here in Maryland doing ecological restoration work of all kinds. We currently employ over 200 of your constituents in such varied missions as stormwater facility maintenance, living shoreline construction, non-native invasive species management, native plant landscaping, and stream restoration.

Along the way, EQR has planted millions of trees, built hundreds of stormwater facilities, created and restored hundreds of acres of wetlands (both tidal and nontidal), and restored hundreds of miles of streams. All of which has made a huge, positive, and perceptible impact on the health of the watershed.

However, we are not alone. Far from it.

Four decades of scientific research, practical implementation, and collaboration across disciplines has developed Maryland's restoration community into a major driver of innovation and an employer of thousands.¹ Maryland is home to the finest ecological restoration practitioners in the whole world, and EQR is just one of dozens of world-class firms engaged in the generations-long effort to restore health and function to the Bay.

The fact is that private ecological restoration firms have invested hundreds of millions locally in the human and technical capacity required to make bay-wide restoration goals possible. It's an investment that crucially accrues economic and environmental benefits here with us in the watershed.

Maryland's leadership in watershed science should be something we are all proud of. Yet, instead of looking forward to improving outcomes and fostering the ecological restoration innovation powerhouse in our own backyard, this bill aims to undercut one of the most important elements of the success story.

¹ BenDor T, Lester TW, Livengood A, Davis A, Yonavjak L (2015) Estimating the Size and Impact of the Ecological Restoration Economy. PLoS ONE 10(6): e0128339. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0128339>

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The 2022 HB0869 Ecological Restoration Study² and the 2024 Whole Watershed Act³ have already put stream restoration under the microscope and added additional requirements to the process over and above what is required of even commercial development. This legislative body has debated the same topic many times already and come to the same conclusion: Stream restoration is too important of a BMP to throw out, and likewise the ecological restoration community in Maryland is too important to our environment and our economy to undercut.

I urge you to follow the guidance of the Chesapeake Bay Program⁴. Additionally, Science and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) 2024 “State of the Science Report” on stream restoration. In it a cross-section of scientists, regulators, and stakeholders evaluated stream restoration outcomes and issued clear guidance on how to improve results from stream restoration projects.⁵

To their credit, MDE has already incorporated these practical recommendations into guidelines for stream restoration projects, and the last round of new requirements went into effect just this past fall. We should continue to let science and expertise lead the way and to support the most effective approaches for the watershed and the community.

I strongly urge an UNFAVORABLE report on SB 688.

Respectfully submitted,



Liam O'Meara

President

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https://mde.maryland.gov/programs/water/WetlandsandWaterways/Documents/Restoration/MDE_Ecological%20Restoration%20Study%20Report_8.6.2024.pdf

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https://mde.maryland.gov/programs/water/WetlandsandWaterways/Documents/Restoration/Whole%20Watershed%20Act/Whole%20Watershed%20FAQs_MDE%20WWPP2.pdf

⁴ Recommendations of the expert panel to define removal rates for. (n.d.-b).

https://www.chesapeakebay.net/files/documents/stream_panel_report_final_08282014.pdf

⁵ Chesapeake Bay Program Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee. (2024, November 3). The State of the Science and Practice of Stream Restoration. https://www.chesapeake.org/stac/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/STAC-Report_Stream-Restoration_24-006-1.pdf