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September 29, 2016

Christopher C. Judy, Assistant Director
Maryland Department of Natural Resources
Shellfish Division
580 Taylor Avenue B-2
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Homework assignment

Dear Mr. Judy and Fellow Committee Members:

I would like to express my concern to the members of the Oyster Advisory Committee (OAC) concerning the "homework assignment" given at the last meeting. We were asked to come up with two additional rivers that would become the home of yet another oyster project designed for oyster restoration. As I have stated at prior meetings, it is important to first understand the type of project we are building before we decide where it should go.

The previous OAC decided to do an oyster restoration project in Harris Creek, and look at what took place. Harris Creek was the greatest natural oyster hatchery in the entire Chesapeake Bay. During the years when the State of Maryland had a state run shell and seed replenishment program, there were more seed oysters grown and distributed from Harris Creek than any other area in the Bay. According to experts, it took Mother Nature eight to ten thousand years to create this marvel. The former OAC decided that a good oyster restoration project would be to simply cover this area up with large amounts of stone, burying all the oysters and crabs, which also created navigational hazards. This action left this area basically ruined for almost any future use at an unbelievable cost of \$26,000,000.00. If this represents the type of project we are being asked to locate in another river, count me out! No river in the entire Chesapeake Bay deserves such disgusting treatment. I am appalled that we are being asked to ignore the obvious mistakes of the past and continue to move in the same direction. I was under the impression that the reason for recreating a new OAC with new members was to realize the mistakes of yesterday and come up with actual ideas of how to bring the oysters back in greater numbers. So far, I see no evidence that this is our mission.



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Any knowledgeable oysterman knows that before creating any type of oyster project, a proper substrate must exist. Whether you are talking about a sanctuary, seed area, operation of an oyster hatchery, or engaging in the discussion of rotational harvest, the key to the project's success is access to a proper substrate. As I have stated in past meetings, we have completely ignored the oyster bars in the Bay over the last ten years, so it should come as no surprise that they have suffered because of neglect. For forty-six years, the State of Maryland used the proper substrate in managing the industry with great success, at a fraction of the cost of Harris Creek. This identical program has now been adopted by the State of Virginia and has already been deemed successful.

Continuing to follow the failed policies of the past ten years will result in more failed projects. If our hopes are to move in a more positive direction, one of the first items of discussion would be the shell supply located at Man of War shoal, of which Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has already applied for a permit to dredge. Knowing that DNR has applied for this permit, why is it that we refuse to discuss this important ingredient? Why is it taking so long to hear back about the permit? Without the proper substrate, I fear we will meet for the next two years and have nothing positive to show for our efforts, except fewer oysters in the Bay.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. Please know that I remain a dedicated member to the OAC. It would be a great disservice to the OAC if I did not communicate my concerns with my fellow Committee Members. We must have meaningful dialogue in order to succeed.

Yours truly,



Ron Fithian
OAC Member