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Senate Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee

**Testimony in OPPOSITION of Senate Bill 830**

Natural Resources – Fishery Management Plans – Oysters

Wednesday, February 27, 2019

The Delmarva Fisheries Association (DFA) urges an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 830, which will replace the current Oyster Advisory Commission (OAC) with a “Stakeholder Workgroup” that not only requires significant new financial resources, but also seeks to limit the participation of the public fishery in a management plan for oysters. SB 830 is a direct and coordinated attack on the public fishery – at the expense of those whose livelihoods depend on the seafood industry, local economies and proponents of Bay wide oyster restoration using a strategy inclusive of the commercial fishery.

Since 2016, the re-formed Maryland Oyster Advisory Commission has worked to understand the science, economics, social and cultural aspects of oyster management and restoration issues in the Chesapeake Bay in order to assist DNR in its development of a fishery management plan for oysters. It is worth mentioning, given the Fiscal and Policy Note on this bill, that the OAC has fulfilled this role, one which seems nearly identical to the “Stakeholder Workgroup,” for a fraction of the projected cost: \$80,000 vs. \$872,000.

As we dig further into the financial notes, we see that more than half of the money allocated for FY 2020 will be used to pay salaries for UMCES faculty (\$452,000 of \$872,00) and an additional third of the funds will be used for the workgroup expenses (\$291,000). This leaves just \$129,000 for the Maryland Department of Natural Resources to do the monitoring of the actual oyster stock. All of these funds will be pulled from the General Fund with no indication how the money will be either raised or diverted from existing programs. To our members, this legislation appears to be an avenue to bulk up support for UMCES and meeting planners using money that would be better spent on seed, shell and other measures that would positively impact the oyster population in the Chesapeake Bay.

Too often the politicization of a natural resource leads to the demise of the industry that depends on the natural resource. SB 830 represents the latest in a string of legislation that is designed to disenfranchise watermen. The language regarding the “Workgroup” structure makes it clear which special interest groups assisted in the creation of this legislation; these organizations are called on by name to provide a representative to the new group and will be joined by “a representative of a commercial seafood organization.” DFA, which represents 90% of the

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working oystermen in the Maryland portion of the Chesapeake Bay, is not named, nor is the Maryland Oystermen's Association.

SB 830 has all the earmarks of yet another delay tactic by certain environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS). Each time we begin to reach consensus about managing oysters that is inclusive of the commercial industry, these groups call for a new committee or a new study that adds years to the process, opens up new streams of revenue for these same ENGOS, and further hurts hard-working Maryland communities that rely on the bounty of the Bay.

The members of DFA are committed to a prudently managed fishery and welcome the opportunity to be included in, rather than ostracized from, the coordination and management of this ecologically and economically valuable public resource. We are extremely wary of diverting restoration funds from activities that increase the number of oysters in the Bay in order to fund yet another group of facilitators who will lead a stakeholder conversation until the wild fishery is a historical footnote in our great State's history.

For these reasons, DFA urges an UNFAVORABLE report on SB 830.

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