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July 16, 2019

Via email

Ms. Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio, Secretary
Department of Natural Resources
580 Taylor Avenue
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
jeannie.riccio@maryland.gov

Re: Oyster RFP Process

Dear Madam Secretary:

The Delmarva Fisheries Association (DFA) is a 501(c)(6) trade association established to protect, defend and enhance the commercial fishing industry in the DelMarVa region for present participants as well as future generations through all legal means while maintaining healthy and sustainable stocks of fish. Our members in Kent, Queen Anne's, Talbot, Dorchester and Somerset counties comprise nearly 80% of the oyster fishery in Maryland. It has recently come to our attention that the Maryland Watermen's Association (MWA) is spreading panic through the oyster fishery by circulating false and misleading information about the RFP recently released by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

We have fielded phone calls from concerned watermen over the past several days as a direct result of MWA's hysterical rhetoric and have been working diligently to reassure our members and fishery professionals that DNR's proposal is not cutting out the County Oyster Committees or the working watermen in our State. It has been clear to DFA since this RFP was first issued that MWA and the Oyster Recovery Project (ORP) are threatened by your Department's efforts to improve transparency and accountability in the critical Seed and Shell Replenishment program. The sad fact is, rather than applaud your efforts to improve efficiency and cut costs, MWA is engaged in a campaign to preserve the *status quo*. Why? Because those who are profiting from the current order of things (and have been for nearly a decade) will undoubtedly resist any change that may impact their pocket book. They fear that their cash cow will dry up if they must compete with other qualified vendors to provide the best service at affordable prices. It is not surprising that the prospect of closer scrutiny upsets them, given the high mortality rate of hatchery seed on shell once it leaves their lab or hatchery. What is surprising is that they would circulate a form letter to try and disrupt DNR's proposal process after the deadline for proposals has passed. If they were truly concerned about cutting out the County Oyster Committees, they had plenty of time to address this with the Department while the bid was open and questions were being accepted. Instead, the very first question from the MWA representative who attended the RFP pre-bid meeting on June 12, 2019 was about managing conflicts of interest and to our knowledge, no concerns were raised by MWA about either the County Oyster Committees (other than one related to conflict of interest) or working watermen throughout the month-long RFP question period.

DFA was pleased to see that the DNR was proactively issuing this competitive bid in an effort to achieve what should be a shared goal: increasing the number of oysters in the Chesapeake Bay. We have elected not to submit a proposal because we are concerned the natural shell shortage caused by the legislative machinations around dredging at Man O'War Shoals have created a situation where Virginia has a chokehold on the shell supply. This self-imposed shortage allows them to drive up the price of shell and leaves less money to pay the watermen subcontracted to haul and spread the shell. We continue to urge the Department to work with the Board of Public Works to move forward with the dredging permit at Man O'War Shoals and, if the MWA doesn't want DNR to issue a contract for seed and shell replenishment, to consider hiring willing and able watermen directly to engage in the work we know how to do well and cost-effectively.

In closing, we again wish to express our thanks for the opportunity to participate in ongoing efforts to protect the Chesapeake Bay, a resource on which our livelihoods depend. As Maryland's first conservationists, we have appreciated the current Administration's willingness to work with us, rather than paint us as demons wreaking havoc on the aquatic life of one of our greatest national treasures. Despite immense pressure from certain special interest groups, we hope that you will continue to consider a **wild** fishery to be an integral part of Maryland's cultural and economic infrastructure.

Sincerely,



Capt. Robert Newberry, *Chairman*
rnewberry56@gmail.com

cc: County Watermen's Associations
Maryland Watermen's Association

