



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 27, 2019

Testimony in Favor of Senate Bill 830
Natural Resources - Fisheries Management Plan - Oysters

Chairman Pinsky, Vice-Chair Nathan-Pulliam, and members of the Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee,

I respectfully request a favorable report of Senate Bill 830 with amendments. This bill would create a fisheries management plan structured around consensus-based recommendations put forward by stakeholder workgroup made up of 60% industry representatives and 40% environmental advocates.

As you can see from this panel, SB 830 represents a true compromise. It is the best example of stakeholder-led, consensus-driven legislation we can put forward to solve a generations-old challenge to save one of Maryland's greatest natural resources: the Eastern Oyster.

One point each stakeholder, from watermen to scientists alike can agree on: our management of oysters continues to be one of the most controversial and politically charged issues in Maryland. The shifting political winds of the Governor's Office and the Department of Natural Resources can lead to lack of consensus and trust amongst stakeholders. This bill, and most importantly, the process required by the bill, is an attempt to begin to settle this decades-old conflict and move towards a better oyster future for everyone involved.

This bill and process is modeled after the hard work of the with OysterFutures workgroup on the Choptank River and Little Choptank River, where the University of Maryland Center for Environment Science (UMCES) convened the group of stakeholders under the leadership of a professional facilitator in an attempt to come to a consensus on how to govern the oyster fishery in those two rivers.

SB 830 attempts to recreate that successful program on a statewide scale in order to remove the politics from oysters and develop a fisheries management plan that has buy-in and consensus from both waterman and environmentalists alike.

After painstaking negotiations with watermen, environmental groups, and Republican senators, we are offering several amendments to the bill, as follows:

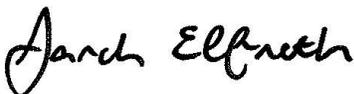
1. The inclusion of stronger preamble language to ensure that the intent of the recommendations put forward by this stakeholder group become the fisheries management plan.
2. The shifting of state and federal agencies and the addition of a bipartisan, bicameral group of legislators from voting members to advisory members of the stakeholder group.

3. Allowing the meetings of the stakeholder group to be conducted in closed executive session in order to ensure that everyone can be as candid as possible during the process.
4. Clarifying the bill from having 11 members of the County's Watermen Association to 11 members of the County's Commercial Oyster Committees.
5. The elimination of the current Oyster Advisory Commission, and giving this new stakeholder workgroup the designation and powers that are granted to that commission to this new workgroup.
6. Ensuring the true 60-40 split by changing the makeup of the work group to include:
 - a. A representative each County's Oyster Committee
 - b. A representative from the Maryland Watermen's Association
 - c. A representative from the Maryland Oystermen's Association
 - d. A representative from the aquaculture industry designated by the Aquaculture Coordinating Council
 - e. A representative from the commercial seafood buyer industry designated by the Secretary
 - f. A representative from the Coastal Conservation Association of Maryland
 - g. A representative of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation
 - h. A representative of the Nature Conservancy
 - i. A representative of the ShoreRivers Riverkeeper Association
 - j. A representative of the Arundel Rivers Federation
 - k. A representative of the Oyster Recovery Partnership
 - l. A representative of the Chesapeake Bay Commission
 - m. A representative from Blue Oyster Environmental
 - n. A representative from the National Aquarium
 - o. A representative from UMCES
7. Clarifying what the goals of the fisheries management plan created by this process are.
8. Clarifying that this new fisheries management plan does not have to look at the previously created fisheries management plan in developing the new plan.
9. Finally, a sponsor amendment to add Senator Hershey to the bill.

The future of Maryland's keystone species and cultural icon cannot depend on who is in the Governor's office. SB 830 is not a partisan bill. Rather, it represents the best public policy we can put forward on one of the most controversial issues before the General Assembly in this or any other session. Following the wisdom of the idiom "the journey is more important than the destination" the process delineated by SB 830 to build trust, confidence, and consensus-driven solutions is equally important to the outcome: a balanced approach to ensuring the future of the Eastern Oyster in the Chesapeake Bay for generations to come. That process has already begun with how we have worked together on this bill and how we, with your support, will pass Senate Bill 830.

I respectfully ask for a favorable report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah Elfreth". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Senator Sarah Elfreth