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**RECREATIONAL ANGLERS
WORKING TO CONSERVE, PROMOTE, AND ENHANCE MARYLAND'S
MARINE RESOURCES**

February 28th, 2018

To: Honorable Kumar P. Barve, Chair
Honorable Dana Stein, Vice-Chair
Honorable Members of the House Environment & Transportation Committee

Re: **HB 1137** Natural Resources – Fisheries – Commercial Oyster Divers

CCA Maryland Position: Support

The harvesting of oysters by divers is a harvest technique that results in minimal if any negative environmental impact on oyster habitat. The most recent data available reports that only about 9% of the total oyster harvest is by divers.

In contrast to the harvest of oysters by divers, mechanical dredges are used to harvest 42% of the wild harvest (32% by power dredges and 10% by skipjacks) and this gear has been shown to have a detrimental effect on oyster habitat. A report to the Oyster Advisory Commission on 10/17/16 by Jim Wesson from the Virginia Marine Resource Commission concludes: *“Harvest by dredge or hand-scrape always reduces the number of oysters for all size classes, the smaller the oyster, the greater the impact and always reduces the quantity and quality of shell available for future spat set”*.

A report to the Maryland General Assembly from DNR dated April 2004 and titled Evaluation of the Effects of Power Dredging for Oysters states: *“Areas that received consistent spat-fall were capable of sustaining some level of power dredging. Conversely areas where recruitment was sporadic experienced rapid declines to abandonment of harvesting.”*

Maryland strongly supports oyster restoration in our sanctuaries, an increase in oyster aquaculture and the development of a sustainable wild oyster fishery informed by the results of the evaluation mandated by The Sustainable Oyster Population and Fishery Act of 2016.

This legislation will remove a current burden from oyster divers in finding suitable crew and will have a positive impact on oyster diving businesses, without increasing the impact on the overall wild oyster resources at this time.

CCA Maryland respectfully requests a favorable report on HB 1137