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

Via email only to jodi.baxter@maryland.gov

Mrs. Jodi Baxter
Maryland Department of Natural Resources
580 Taylor Avenue
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SFAC Feedback Request on Oyster Stock Assessment Management Toolbox

Mrs. Baxter-

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input and feedback on the management strategies to address the maintenance of a sustainable oyster population and fishery. As recreational anglers, the members of CCA Maryland fully recognize the importance of oysters as a keystone species in the Chesapeake Bay. The many ecosystem services that oyster provide directly impact the finfish species that the recreational angling community pursues, and therefore directly supports the economic engine that is recreational fishing in Maryland and beyond.

As the stock assessment is incorporated into the management of Maryland's oyster resource and fishery, it is extremely important that a focus goes beyond the fishery and simply sustaining wild harvest. Unfortunately, Maryland's wild oyster resource and fishery has gone through a number of boom and bust cycles over the last many decades, causing major economic and ecological swings, and failing to find true sustainability. Given recent declines in the population and fishery, it is of the utmost importance to the future of the Chesapeake Bay that efforts to improve the science based management of the oyster stocks succeed. The management toolbox has a number of tools that can lead to an ecological and economic balance for the oyster resource and fishery, but these tools must be fully understood by all stakeholders if new management techniques are expected to succeed.

Maryland's oyster fishery and resources have been burdened with over 150 years of conflict fueled by regional conflict, overharvest, disease, ecological and environmental impacts, regulatory and legal changes, and more. This has all lead to a divide amongst the many stakeholder groups, including divides within the oyster industry itself. This history increases the complexity of using a stock assessment and any toolbox to work towards a fishery that is truly sustainable both economically and ecologically, but does not make success unachievable.

Managing the stakeholders in a fishery can be as difficult as managing mother nature and our publicly held natural resources. Transparency and an opportunity for deliberative and structured conversations will be a key to truly utilizing any tools available, and building a process beyond the existing advisory commissions should be a priority.

As you are likely aware, a number of partners and a diverse group of stakeholders worked through an oyster focused consensus building workshop over the last 2+ years called Oyster Futures. As a participant in the process, I entered the first meeting with a good deal of skepticism, and concern to the true value that a discussion amongst such a diverse number of stakeholders could provide. After the first meeting, it became very clear to me that having well trained team of facilitators and clear scientific modeling to lead the way for conversation was a very powerful way to work through the difficult and

long-standing challenges associated with oyster management. As the process unfolded over a number of meetings, and the participants could quickly see that their questions and input was considered by other stakeholders, and built upon in scientific models to provide a long-term view for certain management strategies. The process required all participants to be willing to be open minded, and compromise.

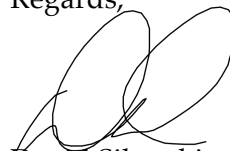
One of the major causes of conflict amongst varying stakeholders related to the oyster fishery and resource is the tunnel vision that each stakeholder group naturally has. It is human nature to trust what you see and experience, but through a process like Oyster Futures, each stakeholder is provided an opportunity to better understand and accept varying viewpoints and experiences.

The scientific guidance provided at each meeting helped each participant understand the very complex components of the natural equation that drives our wild oyster population and fishery, and allowed a focus on policies and practices for the fishery that could compliment the known natural challenges. The final product of the Oyster Futures process has been presented to Maryland DNR at this time, and should be used as a complete package for possible management concepts in the Choptank Region, but the recommendations are not meant to be used in a piece meal fashion, nor should it be assumed that the concepts contained in the report can be replicated for use in other regions. A full review of the oyster futures process and the final report can be viewed here: <https://oysterfutures.wordpress.com/>

A consensus building process like Oyster Futures does come at a cost and will take a strong commitment from academics, stakeholders, and state leadership, but given the importance of the oyster both ecologically and economically to Maryland, but the return on consensus based management policies will reap many rewards well into the future. Without ecological stability, we cannot have the economic stability in any fishery in the region, and without an economic incentive for ecological health, it is extremely difficult to focus on solutions that provide a benefit to all.

CCA Maryland has always worked to support management practices that place the health of the resource first, and to focus on the concept that a healthy resource can provide the maximum benefit to the general public, and subsequently all stakeholders. It is with this idea in mind that I provide the strong recommendation that a consensus stakeholder process like Oyster Futures be the first step that both DNR, the Maryland General Assembly, and all interested stakeholders agree to work within, as the new stock assessment and management tools are considered for our wild oyster resource and fishery.

Regards,



David Sikorski
Executive Director

CC: David Blazer
Bill Anderson
Mark Belton
Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio