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

January 29, 2019

To: Honorable Kumar P. Barve, Chairman
Honorable Dana Stein, Vice Chairman
Honorable Members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee

Re: House Bill 1 – Natural Resources - Prohibition on Dredging Buried Oyster Shells on Man-O-War Shoals

CCA Maryland Position: Support

Coastal Conservation Association Maryland (CCA Maryland), is a state chapter of Coastal Conservation Association (CCA), a nationwide non-profit, and the largest saltwater recreational fishing organization in the country. As anglers, and avid users of our natural resources, CCA Maryland members work hard to promote sensible science-based management measures to support sustainable fisheries for the benefit of the general public, and the long-term health of the Chesapeake Bay.

Given the important role that oyster reefs play in supporting healthy fish habitats, clean water, and recreational fishing opportunities, CCA Maryland consistently opposed the dredging of buried shell at Man O War Shoal.

We respectfully offer the following reasons for supporting House Bill 1, which will prevent the degradation of the last large oyster bar in the upper Bay.

1. Dredging MOW Shoal for its buried shell is a short-term proposal for the problems surrounding the lack of oyster shell in the Chesapeake Bay. Oyster shell degrades with time with some studies showing that shell degrades as quickly as 16% a year, and, therefore, in 6-8 years the shell is no longer effective as cultch. The long-term results of the use of buried shell to subsidize the public oyster industry is known, not as a theoretical exercise, but as an observed 46-year experience.

From 1960 until 2006 DNR dredged nearly 200 million bushels of buried oyster shell from the upper bay and barged them into the southern bay where salinity is higher to grow oysters. It was known as the “Repletion Program”.

When concentrated shell deposits were exhausted and public opposition to dredging developed the program stopped. After the program ended the upper bay bottom had been forever altered and the public had nothing to show for the use of this finite natural resource.

The practice of buried shell dredging is best described as “strip mining” the bottom of the upper bay.

2. Since the beginning of efforts to restore oysters in the Chesapeake Bay many have claimed that only oyster shell is appropriate for growing oysters. However, since 2008 when DNR was mandated to submit a permit application to the Corp of Engineers to dredge buried shell, there has been extensive experience with the use of alternative materials such as granite, environmentally clean concrete and limestone marl for growing oysters. In many cases, these alternative materials have proven as effective or more effective as oyster shell.

Alternative materials are being used for oyster restoration and in Virginia and throughout the Gulf of Mexico for growing oysters for commercial harvest. These materials have been proven to be a viable option for growing oysters and negate the need to dredge and use buried oyster shell. Alternative materials are more durable, more readily available and less expensive than dredged buried shell. The availability of alternative materials for growing oysters eliminates the reason for dredging MOW Shoal.

3. Man O War Shoal has been used in a non-destructive way by generations of upper bay citizens for boating, fishing, crabbing, and harvesting oysters. In recent years the western 1/3 of the shoal has been planted with oysters (spat on shell) by local watermen who will also seek the protection of this area from the dredging of buried shell.

Boaters from the multiple marinas in the area use Man O War, and support many marine services in the region.

Given the other many impacts already felt by this area from previous shell dredging activities, and the continued impacts felt by sediment and run-off from the Susquehanna River and Conowingo Dam, any action to degrade the important three-dimensional habitat that Man O War Shoal provides is unjustifiable.

A marine natural resource like Man O War Shoal that is used by many citizens in the region, and provides numerous ecological benefits should not be forever altered for the short-term benefit of a small number of citizens in other portions of the Chesapeake Bay.

For these reasons, we respectfully request a favorable vote on HB1.