

and before most people realized it had been set up, the Commission already had embarked upon one of the most ambitious programs in the history of the State—the rehabilitation of the bountiful resources of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries.

I was not one of those who was surprised by the prompt action of the Commission. I have known Dr. H. C. Byrd for many years and am fully aware of his many talents—his energy, his drive, his vision, his capacity to organize. But to mention and to praise the Chairman of the Tidewater Fisheries Commission is not to imply that it is a one-man organization. It is, on the contrary, a team of talented, public-spirited men.

Our State has been richly endowed by nature, and among the finest of its natural resources is the Chesapeake Bay and the rivers which flow into it. This vast body of water is potentially the best fishing ground in the country. It has been a source of livelihood for many thousands of Marylanders for nearly three and a half centuries. It is a fact, however, that the people of Maryland have never realized the potentiality of the Bay, its tributaries and the Atlantic Ocean in our territorial waters.

During the past several years, we have witnessed a sharp decline in the yield of certain seafoods, and particularly oysters. Our oyster production last year sank to the lowest level since the bleak depression years of the early 1930's—a meager 1,968,894 bushels. The number of packing houses in the State, I am informed, dropped last year from 124 to 80. It takes no imagination to foresee what will happen unless drastic steps are taken to halt this deplorable trend.

As I campaigned through Tidewater Maryland last year, I heard critical comments on every side about the failure of the Tidewater Fisheries Commission to alleviate dissatisfactions that evidently existed. I was determined that something had to be done, and be done without delay. After I was inaugurated as Governor, I cast about for ways to rehabilitate the seafood industry as a whole. This, in my mind, meant rehabilitation, not only in the sense of replenishing the supply of oysters, but also in extending help in one way or another to packers so that they might compete with the packers and buyers of other states. The reorganized Tidewater Fisheries Commission is a result of this determination and this thinking.

What has the Tidewater Fisheries Commission done, then, to merit the confidence I said I had that it will accomplish its great task?

Well, first of all, it has, to a large degree, changed the basic concept of its function. No longer is the Commission to be considered primarily a law-enforcement agency, although, of course, enforcement is to remain