

Have we been shortsighted, negligent, too sparing of effort? Yes, it would certainly seem so.

Recently, someone brought to my attention a rather astonishing document. It was a report, dated 1884, warning the Maryland Legislature of the oyster depletion and offering suggestions on how to prevent it. Sixty-five years later, a Rutgers University professor, one of the outstanding oyster scientists of the country, commented on this report, stating that if the advice had been heeded "there would be only one oyster problem for the Chesapeake Bay today—where to find the markets for the vast number of oysters produced on the prolific reefs of this area."

Significantly, the perils so precisely pointed out in 1884 are the ones we have been hearing about over the last few years and are still hearing about today.

Why, then, we ask ourselves, were those warnings ignored? I believe that those of us who are familiar with the economic, social and political backgrounds of oyster production know the answers. But it is of no profit to us to deplore actions of the past. It is, rather, our obligation to plan for a better future.

Some of our present difficulties, many of them identical with the ones warned about in 1884, are readily apparent. Our production has not kept up with the demand for oysters by an increasing population, and increasing demands have caused overfishing, with consequent depletion of supplies.

We have failed to utilize our underwater land with the same efficiency as our lands above water; that is to say, achieve more production on decreasing acreage. We have suffered from a lack of sufficient cultch to plant our bottoms. We have failed to inaugurate a broad seed-growing program. Lax enforcement of the laws has allowed the taking of small oysters which should have been left on the bottoms until they grew to marketable size. Bottoms have been denuded to the extent that insufficient quantities of oysters have been left for spawning stock. Numerous other more or less important causes of depletion could be cited, but it seems unnecessary for me to list them in detail to a group I am sure is as familiar with them as I.

I have not mentioned the inroads fungus and other predators have made on our supplies. So far, at least, Maryland seems to have escaped the latest devastating attacks of this kind. We, nevertheless, are aware of the threat, and our research laboratory is cooperating with the federal government, and with the laboratories of your states, in an effort