

## No. 19

## (Senate Joint Resolution 32)

Senate Joint Resolution calling on the Governor of Maryland to appoint a special commission to make a comprehensive study of the problems and prospects of the Maryland oyster industry, including an examination of the legal and institutional arrangements governing the oyster fishery and their economic effects, and to submit recommendations for measures to insure the survival of the industry and promote its healthy growth.

The harvesting of oysters, the most valuable product of Maryland's seafood industry, has declined drastically over the years. In 1962-63 the oyster catch from Maryland waters sank to an all-time low of 1.2 million bushels, only one-fifth of the 5.7 million bushels recorded at the turn of the century in 1900-01. Nevertheless, the value of oyster production continues to bulk large in the State's total output of seafood products. In calendar year 1963, 7.8 million pounds of oyster meat were produced with a dockside value of \$5.6 million (before processing), which was 52 percent of the value of all Maryland seafood products in that year.

As a result of the declining trend in production, Maryland oysters, which are prized throughout the country for their size and quality, have lost a great part of their former markets. These markets are now being largely supplied by oysters produced in other areas, which, in many cases, are harvested more efficiently and sold at more competitive prices. The decline in oyster yields has adversely affected some 12,000 watermen, packing plant workers and others who are wholly or partly dependent on the oyster industry for their livelihood.

The reduction in the Maryland oyster catch is not attributable to natural causes since the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries continue to offer highly favorable conditions for the growing of oysters. These oyster fishing grounds have been largely free of the oyster disease and water pollution problems that have affected production in certain other areas. The high potential of Maryland's waters for oyster production is the basis for the major expansion in the State's oyster propagation program undertaken in recent years.

Present efforts to expand the seeding of oysters cannot, however, be expected to result in significantly increased yields unless sound conservation and management practices are observed in harvesting. Existing laws and regulations governing the oyster fishery are complex and lacking in uniformity, which makes for difficulties in their administration and enforcement. Moreover, the harvesting methods which they sanction do not always conform to sound conservation principles, and the restrictions they impose on the economic organization of oystering hamper efficient operations. Remedial measures to correct these and other deficiencies, such as the lack of an effective program to expand the market for Maryland oysters, are urgently needed if the industry's potential is to be realized; now, therefore, be it

*Resolved by the General Assembly of Maryland, That the General Assembly call on the Governor of Maryland to appoint a special commission to make a comprehensive study of the problems and prospects*