

SENATE OF VIRGINIA

BILL DeSTEPH
8TH SENATORIAL DISTRICT
PART OF THE CITY OF VIRGINIA BEACH

588 CENTRAL DRIVE
VIRGINIA BEACH, VA 23454
(757) 321-8180



COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS:
LOCAL GOVERNMENT
REHABILITATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES
TRANSPORTATION

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Contact: Jill Eyler
757.377.3663

VIRGINIA MARINE RESOURCES COMMISSION DENIES FLOATING OYSTER CAGE REQUEST IN BROAD BAY

(Virginia Beach, VA) - Yesterday morning the Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC) held their regularly scheduled monthly meeting at their headquarters in Hampton. On the agenda was an item of particular interest to those who live along and recreationally utilize tributaries of the Chesapeake Bay.

The Lynnhaven Oyster Company, LLC was requesting authorization from the VMRC to install up to 2,100 floating oyster cages within the Broad Bay area of the Lynnhaven River near one of our area's most precious resources, First Landing State Park—the most visited state park in the Commonwealth. This request posed significant user conflict issues, potentially upsetting the balance between the aquacultural, recreational, and navigational use of our waterways.

While I recognize the value oysters bring to the ecological health of the Lynnhaven River and certainly support the economic importance of our seafood industry, I am in agreement with the many who came to speak before the commission that, in this case, the cons simply outweighed the pros.

Of particular concern were the safety issues these cages would pose to boating, kayaking, and other recreational users of the waterways; the disruption in the beauty of Broad Bay, which many visit our area to enjoy—not just because these cages would change the vista, but the inevitable degradation of the cages due to weather, bird and other causes; as well as the dangerous precedent a permit such as this would set. Numerous speakers expressed their support of “on the bottom” oyster cages and local commercial fishermen's right to earn a living, but felt that the rights of residents and visitors to use a natural resource—the surface of the bay—was not something that could be infringed upon or given away.

Senator John Cosgrove, Delegate Anne Farrell Tata, and I gladly stood with the other affected stakeholders at this meeting to voice opposition on behalf of our constituents. We were very pleased with the VMRC's decision to deny this request and demonstrate their ongoing commitment to the oversight of Virginia's aquatic resources.

I am grateful to the VMRC for listening and being responsive to our constituents. I am also deeply appreciative of the members of the community who expressed their concerns to me and allowed me the opportunity to represent them in achieving this positive outcome.