

Honorable Congress people and speakers and guest

I am Mark Wallace representing the Eastern Shore Waterman's Association that has an annual membership of around 80 individuals and represents 757 commercial fishermen who live on the Eastern Shore of Virginia.

In 2002 Virginia's commercial fisherman harvested 100 million dollars of finfish and shellfish. In the last decade the fishing industry has seen numerous regulations to reduce over harvesting. These regulations have led to much hardship for individuals who rely upon fishing for their livelihood. While over harvesting may negatively affect the industry, we feel this is a secondary problem aggravated by poor water quality.

The hard clam aquaculture industry is also dependent upon clean water. In 2000 this industry had a local economic impact of 40 million dollars. Aquaculture offers an alternate way for commercial fisherman to make a living while alleviating pressure on native stocks. It is important to expand the aquaculture industry to other species. For instance the Ariakensis oyster is being studied to explore its feasibility as an aquaculture species. The Ariakensis has an economic potential for fisherman, and the ability to improve water quality through filtration.

Let me offer a couple more examples of the hardships affecting the fishing industry. I serve as the secretary on the harbor committee of my town. In 1989 there were 103 stalls available to lease. Of these 103 stalls, commercial fisherman occupied 59. In 2004 this number is down to 17 individuals who are active in commercial fishing and aquaculture. This harbor has shifted from a commercial harbor that was put in place by the local commercial fisherman, to a recreational harbor. When the commercial fishery was very active it supported a small store by the harbor. As the number of commercial fisherman declined the store opened seasonally, and now it is closed year round.

In my town there is a crab processor. The scale of this business has declined substantially in the last decade. In the early 1990's this business employed at least 10 full time employees. Today there are only 4 seasonal employees during the month of May. This illustrates the effects of a declining harvest from the Chesapeake Bay.

These examples demonstrate the necessity of clean water to the fishing industry. We cannot say if the Chesapeake Bay Program has helped our industry. We do know that we are at a critical state, and that it is imperative that we continue to work towards a cleaner Chesapeake Bay to maintain a strong fishing and aquaculture industry to support both the economic and cultural benefits of the industry.