

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2014 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Revised

House Bill 118

(Delegate Luedtke)

Environmental Matters and Economic
Matters

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Task Force to Study the Impact of Ocean Acidification on State Waters

This bill establishes the Task Force to Study the Impact of Ocean Acidification on State Waters staffed by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The task force must analyze the best available science regarding ocean acidification and the potential effects of acidification on the ecology of State waters and on State fisheries and make recommendations regarding potential strategies to mitigate the effects of acidification on State waters and on State fisheries. The bill provides for the membership of the task force and specifies that task force members may not receive compensation but are entitled to reimbursement for expenses. The task force must report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly by January 1, 2015.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2014, and terminates June 30, 2015.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Any expense reimbursements for task force members and staffing costs for DNR are assumed to be minimal and absorbable within existing budgeted resources.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: State law does not address ocean acidification and its effect on State waters or fisheries.

Background: Ocean acidification describes a process by which rising levels of carbon dioxide emitted into the atmosphere dissolve into the oceans, thereby decreasing the pH (increasing the acidity) of the water. This process also occurs in other surface waters, such as the Chesapeake Bay. The effects of ocean acidification are numerous and complex, and include coral bleaching and the dissolving of calcium carbonate structures that are essential for many marine organisms.

According to a recent issue of the *Chesapeake Quarterly*, a publication of the Maryland Sea Grant, several scientists have undertaken studies of the effect of acidification on the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. According to the scientists, even less is understood about acidification of estuaries such as the Chesapeake Bay than about ocean acidification. The scientists indicate that additional study is needed for several reasons, including to explore why acidity levels in the saltier waters of the Chesapeake Bay are increasing to a greater extent than expected based on atmospheric carbon dioxide levels alone; one hypothesis is that this unaccounted for source of acidity may result from hypoxic conditions (dead zones).

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Department of Natural Resources, Maryland Department of the Environment, Maryland Sea Grant, Department of Legislative Services

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