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HOUSE BILL NO. 599

Offered January 14, 2026

Prefiled January 13, 2026

A BILL to amend and reenact § 28.2-1100 of the Code of Virginia, relating to Virginia Institute of Marine Science; duties; oyster stock assessment; report.

Patron—Simonds

Committee Referral Pending

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That § 28.2-1100 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:

§ 28.2-1100. Virginia Institute of Marine Science continued; duties.

The Virginia Institute of Marine Science shall hereafter be referred to as the Institute. The Institute shall:

1. Conduct studies and investigations of the seafood and commercial fishing and sport fishing industries;
2. Consider ways to conserve, develop and replenish fisheries resources and advise the Marine Resources Commission and other agencies and private groups on these matters;
3. Conduct studies of problems pertaining to the other segments of the maritime economy;
4. Conduct studies of marine pollution in cooperation with the State Water Control Board and the Department of Health and make the data and their recommendations available to the appropriate agencies;
5. Conduct hydrographic and biological studies of the Chesapeake Bay, its tributaries, and all the tidal waters of the Commonwealth and the contiguous waters of the Atlantic Ocean;
6. Engage in research in the marine sciences;
7. Conduct such special studies and investigations concerning these subjects as requested by the Governor;
8. Engage in research and provide training, technical assistance and advice to the Board of Conservation and Recreation on erosion along tidal shorelines, the Soil and Water Conservation Board on matters relating to tidal shoreline erosion, and to other agencies upon request; and
9. Develop comprehensive coastal resource management guidance for local governments to foster the sustainability of shoreline resources by December 30, 2012. The guidance shall identify preferred options for shoreline management and taking into consideration the resource condition, priority planning, and forecasting of the condition of the Commonwealth's shoreline with respect to projected sea-level rise.

These studies shall include consideration of the seafood and other marine resources, such as the waters, bottoms, shorelines, tidal wetlands, and beaches, and all matters related to marine waters and the means by which marine resources might be conserved, developed and replenished; *and*

10. Conduct, in collaboration with the Commission, a stock assessment of the oyster population in the waters of the Commonwealth beginning in calendar year 2026 and occurring no less frequently than every three years thereafter. Such assessment shall include comprehensive mapping and sampling of all oyster-growing areas and identify any factors that affect the depletion of oysters, including changes in the habitat, the natural death, and the harvesting of such oysters in the waters of the Commonwealth. Every other assessment shall be a benchmark stock assessment that includes a full analysis and review of the stock condition, focusing on the consideration of new data sources and newer or improved assessment models. The Institute shall report its findings and any recommendations to the Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources, the Commission's Shellfish Management Division, and the Chairs of the House Committee on Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources and the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Natural Resources no later than December 1 of the calendar year in which such assessment has been conducted. The Commission shall incorporate the findings and recommendations of such assessment in its fisheries and restoration management decisions no later than July 1 of the calendar year following the calendar year in which such assessment has been conducted.