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6**HOUSE BILL NO. 619**

Offered January 14, 2026

Prefiled January 13, 2026

A BILL to amend the Code of Virginia by adding a section numbered 28.2-104.2, relating to Marine Resources Commission; Habitat Policy Oversight Committee established; powers and duties; report.

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Patron—Bloxom

Committee Referral Pending

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Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. **That the Code of Virginia is amended by adding a section numbered 28.2-104.2 as follows:**

§ 28.2-104.2. Habitat Policy Oversight Committee; powers and duties; report.

A. For the purposes of this section:

"Committee" means the Habitat Policy Oversight Committee established in subsection B.

"Division" means the Habitat Management Division of the Commission.

B. There is hereby established within the Commission the Habitat Policy Oversight Committee (the Committee), which shall advise the Commission and the Division on policies within their jurisdiction and support the Commission's coastal resilience efforts. The Commission shall retain ultimate regulatory authority, but the Division and the Commission shall consider and give due weight to the Committee's recommendations in decision making processes. The Division shall report to the Commission on Committee activities and how the Committee's recommendations have informed policy and program development, and the Division shall consult with the Committee on all updates or revisions to policy matters not requiring formal Commission approval.

C. The Committee shall meet no less than three times per year and shall have nine voting members that are appointed by the Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources for terms of four years. Vacancies shall be filled in the same manner as the original appointments and all members may be reappointed. Members shall receive no compensation for their services but shall receive reimbursement for actual expenses. In addition to the Chief of the Division and the Deputy Commissioner of the Commission, who shall serve as nonvoting ex officio members, membership of the Committee shall be as follows:

1. One member who is a current Associate Commissioner of the Commission, who shall be the chairman;
2. One member who represents the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, who shall be the vice-chairman;
3. One member who is an employee of an institution of higher education in the Commonwealth other than the Virginia Institute for Marine Science with expertise in marine, environmental, or coastal sciences;
4. One member appointed to a local wetlands board;
5. One member who represents the private marine construction or consulting sector;
6. One member from the conservation or nonprofit environmental advocacy community;
7. One member from the aquaculture or commercial fisheries industry;
8. One member of local or regional government within the coastal areas of the Commonwealth; and
9. One member-at-large with technical, scientific, or policy expertise in coastal resilience.

D. The Committee shall have the following powers and duties:

1. Review and provide recommendations on Division policies, procedures, and priorities;
2. Review and make recommendations on appropriate mitigation strategies for all natural resources under the purview of the Division and alternatives when mitigation banking is not feasible, consistent with applicable laws and regulations;
3. Recommend process improvements to enhance efficiency, transparency, and scientific rigor;
4. Provide advisory input on major habitat-related rulemaking and regulatory amendments prior to Commission consideration;
5. Review actions of the Division to ensure consistency with state resilience and coastal policy plans and objectives;
6. Review and provide comment on proposed regulatory or procedural changes affecting tidal wetlands, subaqueous lands, and dune and beach permitting;
7. Recommend opportunities for interagency collaboration, grant alignment, policy integration, and permit efficiency;
8. Recommend strategies and actions the Commission may pursue to contribute to and advance the goals of the Chesapeake Bay Agreement; and
9. Submit an annual oversight report summarizing the Committee's recommendations and action outcomes to the full Commission.

INTRODUCED

HB619