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HOUSE BILL NO. 599**AMENDMENT IN THE NATURE OF A SUBSTITUTE**

(Proposed by the House Committee on Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources
on January 28, 2026)

(Patron Prior to Substitute—Delegate Simonds)

A BILL to amend the Code of Virginia by adding in Article 4 of Chapter 5 of Title 28.2 a section numbered 28.2-563, relating to Marine Resources Commission; oyster stock assessment; report.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That the Code of Virginia is amended by adding in Article 4 of Chapter 5 of Title 28.2 a section numbered 28.2-563 as follows:

§ 28.2-563. Oyster stock assessment; report.

A. The Commission shall conduct 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 identification of 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 Commission shall report its findings and any recommendations to the Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources 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.

B. In conducting the oyster stock assessment pursuant to subsection A, the Commission may contract for surveying services through a competitive bidding process.

HOUSE SUBSTITUTE**HB599H1**