

Statement of Bernie Fowler, Former Maryland State Senator

**Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands and
Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife
U.S. House of Representatives Natural Resources Committee**

**Hearing on Climate Change and the Chesapeake Bay
June 23, 2009**

Mr. Chairman, Madame Chair, thank you very much for deciding to have this hearing about climate change and the Chesapeake Bay and for making me a part of it.

Most of my childhood and adult life has been spent on or around the Patuxent River and the Chesapeake Bay. My home was located in Broomes Island in Calvert County Maryland, a peninsula county that juts out in the water like a banana with the Chesapeake Bay on one side and the Patuxent River on the other.

I well remember the Great Depression in the late 1920's and 1930's and how dependent we were on the Patuxent River to provide much of our food and income for the bare necessities to sustain our way of life. Broomes Island was a community of approximately one hundred and fifty homes and 90% of the residents were in the water industry. We had no electricity or indoor plumbing but we were happy and seldom in want.

The Patuxent River is the largest estuary located totally in the state of Maryland and the abundance of crabs, fish, oysters, and soft shell clams was astonishing. We had approximately sixty work boats from "the island" that tonged oysters daily during the regular season with two men catching 15-20 bushels of oysters each day. There were twelve commercial seine crew(4 men) netting fish for the market. Baited trot lines were very common and crabbers could catch 6-

8 barrels of crabs in one day. Ten dozen softshell crabs in one day was not unusual. In fact we had a lady whose name was Dixie Buck who could net as many as twenty five dozen soft shell in a day crabbing both tides. This was occurring as recent as the early 1960's. Dixie Buck is gone and so is our seafood.

That's all gone now. The harvest has dwindled to almost nothing and so have the waterman. They can no longer make a decent living as they have taken other jobs.

There are only a few watermen left in the watershed because at present it is difficult to earn a living out of the Chesapeake Bay. Sad but true, a watershed that exported seafood all around the United States of America is now importing crabs and crabmeat from as far away as China and South America. In my opinion this is outrageous and a national disgrace.

The Chesapeake Bay was one of the most productive estuaries in the world giving bountifully of her aquatic life, a great protein factory is all but gone. What a shame that we as the richest nation in the world is making only minimal progress in improving our water quality as we watch this giant heading slowly towards death row. Why has this happened?

Early on we were ignorant and did not understand that the nutrients and toxic material would strangle our Chesapeake Bay. Ignorance is no longer an excuse. We know what is wrong. Urban, suburban, residential and agriculture runoff transporting nitrogen, phosphorous and toxic material into the watershed waste water treatment plants dumping hundreds of millions of gallons a day with the same reputation mimicking storm water runoff. Air deposition emanating from vehicular traffic and fossil fueled power plants are also partners in the demise of the Chesapeake Bay. Individual septic systems (quite numerous) in the watershed are also part of the cause.

Lastly global warming is looming and will not be advantageous to water quality in the bay. Additionally, I am advised by my scientific friends that an increase in water temperature by 2 degrees or greater in the spawning estuaries may abort the entire spawn of striped bass. Sounds scary? It is! More frequent storm activity coupled with an increase in rainfall will add to the

damage already occurring.

We know what to do. It is costly but necessary to rescue the Chesapeake Bay and her tributaries from the jaws of death and bring her back to an estuary that will match the water quality of the 1950's. We will then enjoy our Chesapeake Bay and once again provide wholesome seafood without concern for consumption.

This is my hope, this is my prayer.

I am deeply grateful for this opportunity and greatly admire and respect what you are trying to do and wish you an abundance of success in your quest to do what is just, fair and critically necessary.

Thank you