Summary
The Sustainable Fisheries Goal Implementation Team (Fish GIT) is proposing the addition of a new outcome to an updated 2014 Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement (Agreement) focused on improving water quality from an increased abundance of oysters through sustainable harvest and aquaculture. Tentatively called an oyster "abundance" outcome, it would incentivize increased oyster abundance/biomass in licensed oyster harvest and aquaculture, thereby supporting the economy and water quality of the Chesapeake Bay. Increased oyster biomass improves water quality because oysters remove nutrients and sediment from the water. The CBP would work with industry and fishery managers to identify potential strategies to increase oyster abundance, strategies which could look different in the jurisdictions that oversee oyster harvest and aquaculture. It could also apply the Oyster BMP as one approach to incentivize increased oyster abundance and account for enhanced water quality (nutrient removal).

Justification
Currently, the Agreement has an outcome for increasing oyster reef acreage for the purposes of enhancing the ecosystem services oyster reefs provide, primarily fish habitat. As the name implies, this outcome is restoration focused, and entails creating new reefs for the purposes of improving fish habitat and other ecosystem services. Partners in this work primarily include state and federal agencies and private conservation organizations.

In contrast, the proposed abundance outcome engages the oyster fishing and aquaculture sectors, groups who are not currently connected to the Bay Program outcomes. Oyster management in the Chesapeake Bay is a conservation success story. Since population declines prior to and in the 1990s, harvest in both Maryland and Virginia has increased over the last decade thanks to sound fishery management and restoration. At the same time, production of oysters through aquaculture has also grown dramatically. However, this success story is not one that the CBP is directly involved in, nor does it monitor or report it. An oyster abundance outcome would promote an increased number of oysters on public fishing grounds and produced through aquaculture, therefore increasing the water quality benefits that oysters provide while continuing to support watermen, businesses, and the local economies. It would recognize the efforts of these industries and state agencies to sustainably manage the oyster resource, and further enable industry to market their product as one that directly contributes to the health and restoration of the Bay.

Considerations
The activities to achieve this outcome should be additive, meaning they should go beyond what is already occurring in wild oyster harvest and aquaculture. The idea is to promote an increase of oysters above a baseline to maximize water quality benefits while providing economic opportunities.

The Oyster BMP should be explored as a tool to achieve this outcome, but it does not need to be the only driver or approach for increasing oyster abundance.

We imagine several important activities that need to be completed before a numerical target can be developed for this outcome. These activities could be time-bound outputs and include items like a population assessment (not necessarily Bay-wide, it could be assessments of select areas), and metric development.

There are significant differences between the proposed oyster abundance outcome and the existing reef restoration outcome, including success metrics, supporting activities, and partners. Therefore it is

recommended that this is a different outcome as opposed to an output under the oyster restoration outcome.

[OYSTER ABUNDANCE]
[SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES GIT]

DRAFT OF PROPOSED OUTCOME LANGUAGE

OUTCOME: Oyster Abundance: Enhance the capacity of oysters to improve water quality through increased oyster abundance in the sustainably managed fishery and aquaculture.

GOAL: Sustainable Fisheries

OUTCOME DISPOSITION ADVICE TO MANAGEMENT BOARD: ADD