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Waterkeepers Chesapeake Statement on EIP Report “More Phosphorus, Less Monitoring”

(Takoma Park, MD) Waterkeepers Chesapeake was among several groups calling for a moratorium on new chicken houses on Maryland’s Eastern Shore in response to Environmental Integrity Project’s [report released today](#). Waterkeepers Chesapeake released a statement today:

“Waterkeepers Chesapeake is deeply concerned about the threat posed to the Chesapeake Bay by the massive expansion of industrial poultry operations on the Eastern Shore. Agriculture is the largest source of pollution to the Bay, causing toxic runoff that contributes to lethal conditions for crabs, fish, oysters and other wildlife in the Bay.

The Eastern Shore’s nearly 500 existing industrial-sized chicken operations generate over 300,000 tons of chicken litter annually. Spreading the chicken litter over and over on the same Eastern Shore Farm fields to the point of over-saturation is the most common method of disposal. To date, the poultry industry has failed to develop a solution for its manure problem. In fact, the large poultry companies that own these birds take no responsibility for the excess manure generated by the industry that makes them millionaires, leaving the problem instead to the farmers who grow their birds on contract and to Maryland taxpayers.

While Marylanders pay a tax every year to clean up the problems associated with our own pollution, the poultry industry pays no similar tax, even though it is one of the largest—if not the largest—contributor of pollution to our waters. Is that fair? Is it fair that Maryland taxpayers foot the bill for one of the industry’s biggest polluters and will pay even more if this industry keeps growing?

The EIP report released today suggests that as many as 200 new mega poultry houses have been permitted in Delmarva. This expansion comes at a time when the industry has virtually no plan in place for how to deal with the excess manure, and Eastern Shore communities are increasingly overburdened by the pollution, and the health and quality of life impacts caused by the poultry industry. Before we can consider permitting new operations, we need to see the results of new regulations to curtail phosphorus runoff into the Chesapeake Bay - the Phosphorus Management Tool. Unfortunately, the Phosphorus Management Tool won’t be fully implemented until 2023 and the manure problem is already at crisis proportions.

Anacostia Riverkeeper
Assateague Coastkeeper
Baltimore Harbor Waterkeeper
Chester Riverkeeper
Choptank Riverkeeper
Gunpowder Riverkeeper

Lower James Riverkeeper
Lower Susquehanna Riverkeeper
Miles-Wye Riverkeeper
Potomac Riverkeeper
Sassafras Riverkeeper
Severn Riverkeeper

Shenandoah Riverkeeper
South Riverkeeper
Upper James Riverkeeper
Upper Potomac Riverkeeper
Virginia Eastern Shorekeeper
West Rhode Riverkeeper



Fairness must be brought to the process of cleaning up the Bay. The agricultural sector must be held to the same accountability and transparency standards as other industries to ensure that the pollution it creates is properly regulated to protect our natural resources and our communities. And, these requirements should be consistent across the region, since our waters flow through different states, counties, cities and towns.

Until the poultry industry and the government bodies that regulate it can prove that our waterways, our tourism industry, and the blue crabs and wildlife that define who we are can be safe from any harms of an expanded poultry industry, we must stop the construction of new poultry operations on the Eastern Shore. Waterkeepers Chesapeake is calling on the state to immediately issue a moratorium on new poultry house construction.”

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Waterkeepers Chesapeake, a coalition of 19 independent Waterkeeper organizations working to ensure the waters of the Chesapeake and Coastal Bays are fishable, drinkable, and swimmable.
www.waterkeeperschesapeake.org