

**CITY OF BILOXI
AGENDA ITEM
FACT SHEET**

Item No.:

4 C

Council Meeting Date:

August 19, 2025

ITEM TITLE: RESOLUTION

INTRODUCED BY: Council President Kenny Glavan

CONTACT PERSON: Keri Campbell, Clerk of Council

SUMMARY EXPLANATION:

Resolution of the Mayor and City Council of the City of Biloxi, Mississippi, expressing strong opposition to the proposed leasing of public oyster reefs in Mississippi waters and in support of commercial fishermen from Biloxi, Pass Christian, Long Beach, D'Iberville, Gulfport, and the unincorporated areas of Harrison County in their efforts to preserve the public right of all Mississippians to fish and harvest oysters on the natural oyster reefs of the Mississippi Sound and the preservation of public access to our marine resources

Resolution ☒

Ordinance ☐

Public Hearing ☐

Routine Agenda ☐

Exhibits for Review

Contract ☐

Minutes ☐

Plans/Maps ☐

Deed ☐

Lease ☐

Other (Specify):

Submittal Authorization:

Council President



Mayor ☐

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

COUNCIL ACTION: Motion By: _____ Second By: _____

<u>Vote:</u>	<u>Councilmember</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>AFR</u>	<u>ABST</u>	<u>Councilmember</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>AFR</u>	<u>ABST</u>
	Gray	_____	_____	_____	_____	Tisdale	_____	_____	_____	_____
	Marshall	_____	_____	_____	_____	Glavan	_____	_____	_____	_____
	Nail	_____	_____	_____	_____	Shoemaker	_____	_____	_____	_____
	Creel	_____	_____	_____	_____					

ACTION TAKEN:

KG/kc 081925ACOU

Resolution No.

RESOLUTION OF THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF BILOXI, MISSISSIPPI, EXPRESSING STRONG OPPOSITION TO THE PROPOSED LEASING OF PUBLIC OYSTER REEFS IN MISSISSIPPI WATERS AND IN SUPPORT OF COMMERCIAL FISHERMEN FROM BILOXI, PASS CHRISTIAN, LONG BEACH, D'IBERVILLE, GULFPORT, AND THE UNINCORPORATED AREAS OF HARRISON COUNTY IN THEIR EFFORTS TO PRESERVE THE PUBLIC RIGHT OF ALL MISSISSIPPIANS TO FISH AND HARVEST OYSTERS ON THE NATURAL OYSTER REEFS OF THE MISSISSIPPI SOUND AND THE PRESERVATION OF PUBLIC ACCESS TO OUR MARINE RESOURCES

WHEREAS, the City of Biloxi, Mississippi has a rich and storied history tied to oyster harvesting dating back over three hundred years to the first European settlement on the Mississippi Coast, and resulting in Biloxi being named the "Seafood Capital of the World" in the early 1900s, due to the abundance of oyster reefs in the surrounding Mississippi Sound and the new then high-tech technology of canning, with Biloxi canning factories being among the first large industries in our State; and

WHEREAS, generations of Biloxi residents have built their livelihoods around the oyster industry, working from the harbors of Biloxi and other communities to harvest and distribute fresh Gulf oysters directly to the public and to seafood markets across the region; and

WHEREAS, public access to the wild, naturally occurring oyster reefs and all permitted oyster reefs in the Mississippi Sound are of vital importance to the City of Biloxi as to the culture, heritage, traditions, economy, and way of life for all residents; and

WHEREAS, the City of Biloxi has historically been a primary port for the unloading of harvested oysters in the State of Mississippi, providing berthing space for fishing vessels to easily access productive oyster reefs adjacent to the City and throughout the Coast, thus giving the City of Biloxi a significant vested property interest in the submerged lands and marine resources extending from its' shores and the management thereof; and

WHEREAS, the State of Mississippi's move to privately lease up to eighty percent (80%) of these reefs will cause considerable consolidation of the oyster fishing fleet and a cascading economic effect of driving commercial fishermen out of the market because many of these fishermen rely on combined harvests of oysters, shrimp, and other species to sustain their investments in boats and equipment and operating expense to yield even a small profit essential to their livelihoods; and

WHEREAS, consolidation of these reefs in private use and possession through private leases will cause a significant reduction in revenues generated from berthing fees collected by the City Biloxi in its harbors and will cause additional losses of sales and property tax causing a significant negative impact to the City of Biloxi; and

WHEREAS, the proposed implementation of Mississippi Senate Bill 2648 (2024) and Senate Bill 2263 (2025), which would privatize up to 80 percent of the state's public oyster reefs by leasing them to private entities, poses an existential threat to the traditional, independent oystermen and women who have sustainably worked these waters for generations; and

WHEREAS, under this proposed leasing model, independent oyster harvesters would be forced to work for private leaseholders as contractors-bearing all the same expenses but losing their independence, autonomy, and economic opportunity; and

WHEREAS, the reefs proposed for leasing, including those off the shores of Biloxi were restored through millions of dollars in federal, state, and BP Deepwater Horizon settlement funding-resources provided by taxpayers for the public good-not for private profit of a few consolidated entities; and

WHEREAS, a privatization scheme effectively transforms these publicly funded and historically public resources into assets held and controlled by a few large, well- capitalized

operators, locking out traditional harvesters from participating in or benefitting from the very resource they helped to steward; and

WHEREAS, privatizing oyster reefs would hinder the longstanding practice of selling seafood "right off the docks" in the Biloxi Harbor, dealing a blow to the economic vitality of local seafood markets, restaurants, and businesses that depend on fresh, locally sourced products and it is therefore recognized that the City of Biloxi will be significantly, irreparably harmed by this seismic shift in the management means of oyster reefs and oyster resources;

WHEREAS, wild oyster reefs are not merely commercial resources-they are living ecosystems that play a vital role in maintaining water quality, biodiversity, and shoreline protection. Overharvesting, poor lease oversight, and reduced public access threaten the long-term health of these habitats; and

WHEREAS, the public was not given adequate opportunity to weigh in on this sweeping policy shift-no public hearing was held by either the Mississippi Legislature or the Department of Marine Resources (DMR) before advancing the leasing framework;

WHEREAS, the Mississippi Coastal Fisheries United (MSCFU), in conjunction with over twenty commercial oystermen, has filed a lawsuit alleging violations of due process and public trust, contending that this leasing scheme is both unconstitutional and morally indefensible; and

WHEREAS, this resolution stands in solidarity with those fishermen-our neighbors, families, and friends-who have weathered decades of disasters, including Hurricane Katrina, the BP oil spill, and the devastating 2019 Bonnet Carre Spillway opening, only to now face the potential loss of their profession to privatization.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Mayor and City Council of the City of Biloxi, Mississippi, as follows:

SECTION ONE. The findings, statements, and conclusions contained in the preamble of this resolution are hereby approved, ratified, and adopted.

SECTION TWO. The City of Biloxi hereby expresses its strong and unequivocal opposition to the implementation of Senate Bills 2648 and 2263 and any plan to lease or privatize public oyster reefs in Mississippi waters.

SECTION THREE. The City of Biloxi supports the preservation of public access to oyster reefs and affirms the rights of local oystermen to harvest, sell, and manage these resources through transparent, community-based, and environmentally responsible practices.

SECTION FOUR. The City of Biloxi calls for a full suspension of all oyster reef leasing plans until such time as:

Independent environmental and economic impact assessments are completed;

Broad public engagement is undertaken through meaningful public hearings;

Clear and enforceable protections are established for small, independent fishermen.

SECTION FIVE. The City of Biloxi stands united with its historic oyster fishing community, and commits to protecting the culture, economy, and ecosystems that have defined this coastal city for generations.

SECTION SIX. The Mayor and Municipal Clerk are authorized to deliver a certified copy of this Resolution to Governor Tate Reeves, the Mississippi State Legislature, the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, and the Mississippi Advisory Commission on Marine Resources, urging them to reconsider and halt the leasing of oyster reefs.

SECTION SEVEN. The Mayor and Municipal Clerk are authorized to deliver a certified copy of this Resolution to Ryan Bradley, Executive Director of Mississippi Commercial Fisheries United, Inc.

SECTION EIGHT. This Resolution shall take effect and be in force from and after adoption.