



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Representative Todd Hunter Announces Organization of Coastal Bend Oyster Task Force**

**CORPUS CHRISTI** – Rep. Todd Hunter (R-Corpus Christi) today announced the organization of the Coastal Bend Oyster Task Force. The purpose of the task force is to help develop oyster aquaculture in the Coastal Bend region. Brad Lomax, a local restaurateur in Corpus Christi and Dr. Joe Fox, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Marine Resource Development Chairman, will serve as co-chairs.

“This task force is an important group that will work to develop awareness on the economic and environmental benefits of oyster aquaculture in Texas,” Rep. Hunter said.

“I view oyster aquaculture as an economic development opportunity for the state of Texas,” says Brad Lomax owner of WaterStreet Restaurants in Corpus Christi, “especially after Hurricane Harvey, in the very hard hit coastal counties from Galveston down to Rockport. I have visited Alabama, Florida and both Carolinas to see their oyster farms in action. Oyster farming is environmentally beneficial; it creates jobs and produces a delicious, sustainable product. We need to be doing this – raising Texas Oysters in Texas for Texas Restaurants.”

“In the past seven years, U.S. supplies of oysters has rapidly increased; whereas those for Texas have declined,” says Dr. Joe Fox. “This is due to a variety of environmental factors including hurricanes, freshwater inflow, and drought but also from increased fishing pressure. Increases in overall U.S. oyster production can largely be attributed to expanding mariculture production, a \$200 million industry. Although Texas has one of the largest coastal shorelines in the nation and extensive bay waters, it is the *only* coastal state in the nation that does not engage in production of oysters by mariculture. For Texas to improve sustainability of its oyster supply and essentially double its production of oysters through mariculture, it needs only a small fraction of its total bay area. Oyster mariculture provides substantial ecosystem services to humans and is supportive of on-going reef restoration efforts—all equating to improved economic resilience for a damaged Texas coast. Ultimately, it means jobs for Texans and increased sustainability of Texas seafood that will tremendously benefit the retail sector. For Texans, it should be a “no-brainer,” said Dr. Joe Fox.

Members of the Coastal Bend Oyster Task Force include elected officials, environmentalists, educators, business and community representatives. Task force members will be announced in the coming weeks.

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