

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**IN WAKE OF RECENT SEWAGE SPILLS, LOCAL OYSTER COMPANY URGES
FULL ASSESSMENT OF WASTEWATER INFRASTRUCTURE**

**Seaborn Oyster Co. challenges municipalities to take a more proactive approach to protect
marine resources**

CHARLESTON, South Carolina – In 1972 the Clean Water Act set federal standards to regulate pollutant discharges into our nation’s waterways. This environmental protection forced tremendous investments into wastewater infrastructure, bringing about a gradual restoration of creeks, rivers, and harbors that once ran foul with raw sewage. Unfortunately, much of this infrastructure has reached its end-of-life, and the waterways that were once improved by such investments are now threatened by aging pipes and failing systems.

The recent 2.4 million gallon sewage spill at the headwaters of the Stono River, which forced the closure of half of Charleston County’s shellfish grounds, has raised alarm, causing Seaborn Oyster Company to question the condition of our region’s wastewater infrastructure, calling on municipalities to conduct a full assessment to ensure adequate protections for our marine resources.

Cyrus Buffum, a Charleston-based commercial oysterman and owner of Seaborn Oyster Company suggests, “As the Lowcountry swells with growth, we cannot expect nearly 50-year-old infrastructure to effectively safeguard our waterways. Municipalities must take a more proactive approach to protect our region’s greatest asset.”

Buffum and his company believe this begins with an in-depth analysis of all wastewater infrastructure in the tri-county area, an assessment that should show precisely where and to what extent investments are needed.

Seaborn Oyster Company operates two oyster farms in Charleston County—its primary harvest site, located by Breach Inlet, was not effected by the closure, but another lease held by the company, situated along the North Edisto River, will be closed for a mandated 21 days.

Buffum continues, “We’re fortunate to have oyster beds outside of the closure zone, but others weren’t as lucky. Because of the neglect of our aging wastewater infrastructure, countless watermen are out of work and half of the county’s waterways are now unfit for public use. That’s not right.”

Buffum believes such incidences will continue to occur with greater frequency as the Lowcountry experiences unprecedented annual growth and increased storms threaten coastal resiliency.

Heavy rains from last year’s Hurricane Irma inundated local wastewater systems, causing an infiltration of stormwater to overwhelm aging systems. As a result, according to records from the

South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control, over 500,000 gallons of sewage spilled into tri-county waters, forcing the closure of shellfish beds just as watermen prepared for the season to open.

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Seaborn Oyster Company is a Charleston-based shellfish dealer and operator of two oyster farms in Charleston County. Seaborn employs a traditional method of wild oyster cultivation, using natural farming techniques to produce premium single oysters for the Charleston market.

Cyrus Buffum is a commercial oysterman and owner of Seaborn Oyster Company. Previously, Buffum served as executive director of Charleston Waterkeeper, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to protect the public's right to clean water.