

Environment Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-426

AN ACT CONCERNING ABANDONED FISHING GEAR IN LONG ISLAND

Title: SOUND.

Vote Date: 3/22/2018

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/14/2018

File No.:

***Disclaimer:** The following Joint Favorable Report is prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and does not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose.*

SPONSORS OF BILL:

Environment Committee

Rep. Joseph P. Gresko, 121st Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

Abandoned and/or derelict fishing gear for both commercial or recreational fishing and shell fishing has become an issue in Long Island Sound. Abandoned and/or derelict fishing gear presents a hazard to the ecosystem with the potential to trap, maim or kill various unintended species if not removed from the ecosystem. Proper removal and disposal of the abandoned and/or derelict fishing gear will reduce the number of unintended consequences and improve the ecosystem.

Substitute Language – LCO No. 3041:

As originally drafted, the bill made various changes to section 26-23 of the general statutes to address all derelict or discarded devices. Substitute language, instead, includes subsection (b) to section 26-23 of the general statutes that is specific to derelict lobster gear. Substitute language allows the Commissioner of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to (1) seize any derelict lobster gear, (2) notify the last known licensee of such derelict lobster gear, and (3) clarifies the authority of the Commissioner in instances in instances where there are no identifying markers or the inability to locate the last known licensee.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Robert Klee, Commissioner, CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection:

Supports the bill. “The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) appreciates the intent behind this bill to address the problem of abandoned commercial fishing gear in Long Island Sound and allow for its removal and disposal.” Lobsters and finfish can get caught in derelict fishing gear, increasing mortality without any corresponding harvest benefit. The bill eases restrictions on who can retrieve this gear, improving Long Island Sound fisheries.

DEEP’s requested change is now in the Substitute Language of SB426.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Dr. David Hudson, Research Scientist, The Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk:

Derelict fishing and aquaculture gear are both a navigational and economic hazard to the sound. Through the phenomenon of “ghost fishing,” this gear has a “significant probable impact on fisheries in Connecticut.” This bill allows for a more streamlined and cost-effective method to cleaning up abandoned or derelict fishing gear.

Bill Lucey, Soundkeeper, Connecticut Fund for the Environment/Save the Sound:

Supports the bill. Current restrictions prevent a large-scale cleanup from taking place. Easing these restrictions will allow for a full-scale cleanup, clearing the bottom for a potential blue crab fishery as their numbers increase with warming water.

David Sutherland, Director of Government Relations, The Nature Conservancy:

Supports the bill. “Abandoned traps and gear can wreak havoc and cause tremendous damage to benthic habitats.” This bill does not change the existing one-year reclamation period for abandoned, derelict, or discarded gear. It will allow for removal and recovery of such gear, giving DEEP and DoAG the ability to act when possible or needed.

Seth Wakeman and one hundred plus form letters:

Supports the bill. “A study conducted by Cornell Cooperative Extension between 2014-2016 estimated there are more than 500,000 lobster traps at the bottom of Long Island Sound.” These traps catch bass, crabs, and other sea creatures along with damaging fishing boats and equipment. Current restrictions make it hard for a full-scale cleanup to occur. Passage of the bill will help cleanup efforts move forward.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None

Reported by: Steve Smith

Date: 3/28/2018