

Environment Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-95

AN ACT CONCERNING CONNECTICUT'S SHELLFISH RESTORATION

Title: PROGRAM AND THE CONNECTICUT SEAFOOD ADVISORY COUNCIL.

Vote Date: 2/28/2020

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 2/21/2020

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Environment Committee

Rep. Joseph P. Gresko, 121st Dist.

Rep. Gary A. Turco, 27th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

Connecticut shellfish is an important natural and economical resource to the state. Shellfish beds in Long Island Sound enhances native oyster beds, provides natural water filtration systems, and increases coastal resiliency to adverse weather events. The bill seeks to enhance the expansion of Connecticut oysters, and the Connecticut seafood industry by (1) allowing the Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture (DoAg) to pursue alternate funding sources through private or federal dollars for purchasing and distributing shells on shellfish beds, and (2) reforms the "Connecticut Seafood Advisory Council" to the "Connecticut Seafood Development Council" and changing the membership of the council to reflect the current seafood business in the state for the promotion of Connecticut seafood products and market opportunities.

To reach full maturity, young oysters must attach themselves to other oyster shells or hard substrates. Frequent harvesting can lead to lack of empty shells and other hard surfaces for young oysters to attach to. Oyster recycling programs seek to address these shortages by recovering and reintroducing spent shells to local waterways.

Substitute Language – LCO No. 2306

Substitute language makes the following changes: (1) allows the DoAg commissioner to enter into contracts with multiple parties for the use of shell recovery vessels rather than having a

contract with one party as stated in the original draft of the bill; thus, allowing for more collection and faster deposits of shell on shellfish beds; and (2) makes conforming changes in sec. 22-457 to reflect the name change of the "Connecticut Seafood Advisory Council" to the "Connecticut Seafood Development Council."

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Bryan Hurlburt, Commissioner, Department of Agriculture (DoAg): Supports the Bill. This bill will help an effort to increase the population of oysters in the Long Island Sound (LIS). Restoring shellfish beds in the LIS through an oyster shell recycling program will enhance native oyster beds, leading to more beneficial water filtration that oysters provide and increasing coastal resiliency to adverse weather events. Updates to current statute will allow DoAg to seek alternative funding through private, state or federal grants for the program. The United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resource Conservation Service offers a program that DoAg will be able to apply for after the passage of the bill.

Additionally, updates to the membership of the Connecticut Seafood Council by including a finish producer, seaweed aquaculture producer, and shellfish harvester will full encompass Connecticut's current aquaculture industry.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Bill Lucey, Soundkeeper, Connecticut Fund for the Environment / Save the Sound: The shell fishing industry is one of the largest supporters to clean up the Waters of the Long Island Sound. The reformation of the Connecticut Seafood Development Council will increase sustainable shellfish production in the Sound and lead to a growth in the sustainable seafood industry.

Joan Nichols, Executive Director, Connecticut Farm Bureau: Connecticut's shellfish industry generates over \$30 million annually in farm-gate sales, provides over 300 jobs, and farms more than 70,000 acres of Connecticut's coastal waters. This bill will enhance shellfish restoration and reinvigorate the Connecticut Seafood Council.

Clarinda Higgins: Shared personal testimony as the former Chair, continuing commissioner of the Westport Shellfish Commission. The reuse of shell is valuable for laying a hard surface for oyster adherence.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None Expressed.

Reported by: George Peavy / Ussawin R. Bumpen Date: 3/4/2020