
OLR Bill Analysis

sHB 5229

AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EELGRASS WORKING GROUP.

SUMMARY

This bill requires the eelgrass working group convened under Special Act 23-7 to reconvene by January 1, 2025, for specified purposes. It also requires the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) to select a Connecticut Seagrass Coordinator. DEEP must do this with the Department of Agriculture's (DoAg) Bureau of Aquaculture and UConn.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

WORKING GROUP

The bill requires the reconvened working group to review the (1) Eelgrass Collaborative's work on permitting and eelgrass restoration policies in Connecticut (see BACKGROUND) and (2) U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' existing permit regulations to evaluate future changes and the need to make similar changes to DEEP's and DoAg's policies.

CONNECTICUT SEAGRASS COORDINATOR

Under the bill, the coordinator must generally oversee and interact with those in the eelgrass community and do the following:

1. work with DEEP to develop ways to sustainably harvest eelgrass seeds from existing Connecticut eelgrass meadows for use in restoration projects;
2. research, review, and compile best management practices for aquaculture operations near eelgrass meadows;
3. specify eelgrass-friendly mooring systems in mooring fields with

a high potential to host eelgrass (as predicted by the Eelgrass Habitat Suitability Index model) and identify public awareness campaigns for use of the systems; and

4. establish metrics for evaluating the state's eelgrass restoration efforts to determine a reasonable return on investment.

BACKGROUND

Eelgrass Collaborative

The Long Island Eelgrass Collaborative is a bi-state eelgrass working group formed in 2023 to bring together scientists, practitioners, and other stakeholders to evaluate eelgrass management in Long Island Sound and advance the knowledge of and practical application of eelgrass restoration in the region. The collaborative is funded by the Long Island Sound Study and facilitated by UConn's Connecticut National Estuarine Research Reserve.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Environment Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 34 Nay 0 (03/15/2024)