

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5013

As Reported By House Committee On:
Natural Resources

Title: An act relating to the definition of food fish and enhanced food fish.

Brief Description: Excluding all species of tuna, mackerel, and jack from the definitions of food fish and enhanced food fish.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Natural Resources (originally sponsored by Senator Snyder).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Natural Resources: 3/21/95, 3/28/95 [DPA].

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 13 members: Representatives Fuhrman, Chairman; Buck, Vice Chairman; Basich, Ranking Minority Member; Regala, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Beeksma; Cairnes; Elliot; G. Fisher; Jacobsen; Romero; Sheldon; Stevens and Thompson.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Pennington, Vice Chairman; and B. Thomas.

Staff: Linda Byers (786-7129).

Background: State law establishes an excise tax on "enhanced food fish." The tax is based on the value of the enhanced food fish at the point of landing. Fish excise taxes are collected by the Department of Revenue and are deposited in the state general fund, except for taxes on anadromous game fish, which are deposited in the wildlife fund.

Currently, tuna, mackerel, and jack fall under the definition of "enhanced food fish." The Department of Fish and Wildlife reports the following statistics for commercial landings of tuna into Washington ports: 4.1 million pounds in 1992, 4.8 million pounds in 1993, and 12 million pounds in 1994. Mackerel landings into Washington have been less than 100,000 pounds per year for the same period.

Summary of Amended Bill: The definition of "enhanced food fish" is amended to expressly exclude all species of tuna, mackerel, and jack. The excise tax on enhanced food fish would not apply to landings of these fish species.

Amended Bill Compared to Substitute Bill: The substitute bill also removed tuna, mackerel, and jack from the definition of "food fish" in the Fisheries Code.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Amended Bill: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: We want to encourage more tuna landings into Washington. We are trying to attract processing into this state rather than see it go to Oregon and California. We are trying to enhance the coastal markets. The taxes are a detriment to the industry. When a boat is 1000 miles offshore, it doesn't make much of a difference to come into Oregon, Washington, or California, so you go where it's easiest, fastest, and cheapest.

Testimony With Concerns: The bill would eliminate the department's ability to regulate and manage these species regarding possession, landing, sale, and licenses. Last year there was a good mackerel fishery; the bill would allow mackerel to be taken on sport gear and then sold. Enforcement is also a concern; if the department stopped a boat and the fishers didn't have the license for another species such as salmon, they could claim they were fishing for tuna.

Testified: Ed Owens, Coalition of Washington Ocean Fishermen; Bill Wade and Allen Rogers, Western Fish Boat Owners Association (all in favor); and Cyreis Schmitt, Department of Fish and Wildlife (with concerns).