

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HCR 4401

As Reported by House Committee On:
Natural Resources

Brief Description: Creating a joint select committee on the disposal of derelict vessels.

Sponsors: Representatives Rockefeller, Woods, Hunt and Lantz.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Natural Resources: 2/9/01, 2/14/01 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- A joint select committee on the disposal of derelict vessels is created to review current responsibilities of vessel owners, state agencies, and federal agencies for disposing of derelict vessels; to develop recommendations regarding the disposal and funding for the disposal of these vessels; and to develop recommendations to help prevent the abandonment of such vessels.
- The joint select committee must report its recommendations by January 1, 2002.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Sump, Republican Co-Chair; Pearson, Republican Vice Chair; Rockefeller, Democratic Vice Chair; Buck, G. Chandler, Eickmeyer, Jackley, Murray and Pennington.

Staff: Bill Lynch (786-7092).

Background:

The number of derelict vessels that have been abandoned by their owners has increased in recent years. These vessels can obstruct navigation; and the potential release of hazardous materials from these vessels can cause environmental damage. These vessels are frequently disposed of by sinking them into deep water despite the risk of environmental damage. The costs associated with disposing of these vessels can be quite

high.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

A joint select committee on the disposal of derelict vessels is created consisting of eight members. Four members are from the state Senate and are selected by the president of the Senate, with two members from each of the two major political parties. Four members are from the state House of Representatives selected by the co-speakers of the House, with two members from each of the two major political parties.

The joint select committee must review current responsibilities of vessel owners, the Department of Natural Resources, and federal agencies regarding derelict vessels. The joint select committee must develop recommendations regarding the disposal and funding for the disposal of these vessels, and for preventing the abandonment of such vessels by January 1, 2002. Staff support for the joint select committee is provided by Senate Committee Services and the House Office of Program Research.

The committee must consult with port districts, cities, counties, state and federal agencies, owners of private marinas, commercial fishers, sport fishers, recreational boaters, environmental organizations, and other interested groups in developing the recommendations.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

Language is added to require the committee to also develop recommendations that would help prevent the abandonment of derelict vessels. The committee is directed to consult with interested groups in developing the recommendations.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not Requested.

Testimony For: This is a complex issue, and a joint select committee is the right approach to help address this growing problem. These vessels have little or no scrap value after they are abandoned. The owners of the vessels, even if they can be located, have no assets to go after to pay for the disposal. Many of these vessels are disposed of in landfills, others are sunk in deep water. Millions of dollars that a local government has spent to improve water quality could be undone by a single abandoned vessel. Some of these vessels are abandoned on city beaches, some are abandoned on state-owned aquatic lands. There is little money or mechanisms for the removal of these vessels; and the public health and environment are affected. A survey by the WA Public Ports Association estimates about 100 vessels are abandoned each year. Harbor masters do not

have the authority to stop people in these vessels from cruising through the area. Bainbridge Island recently identified 24 vessels abandoned around the island, and 10 of these vessels were in the 20- to 40- foot range.

Testimony Against: None

Testified: (In support) Representative Rockefeller, prime sponsor; Representative Woods, secondary sponsor; Mayor Lynn Horton, city of Bremerton; Tami R. Allen, Bainbridge Island Harbormaster; David Barry, Bainbridge Island Harbor Commission; Jay Udelhoven, Department of Natural Resources; John Dohrmann, Puget Sound Water Quality team; Eric Johnson, Washington Public Ports; and Bruce Wishart, People for Puget Sound.