

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1958

As Reported by House Committee On:
Natural Resources, Ecology & Parks

Title: An act relating to extending the buyback program for certain limited fisheries that are set to expire at the end of 2005.

Brief Description: Extending certain limited fisheries buyback programs.

Sponsors: Representatives Buck and B. Sullivan.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Natural Resources, Ecology & Parks: 2/22/05 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Extends from December 31, 2005 to December 31, 2010 the expiration of certain taxes and fees earmarked for buying back licenses in the commercial sea urchin and sea cucumber fisheries.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, ECOLOGY & PARKS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives B. Sullivan, Chair; Upthegrove, Vice Chair; Buck, Ranking Minority Member; Kretz, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Blake, DeBolt, Dickerson, Eickmeyer, Orcutt and Williams.

Staff: Jason Callahan (786-7117).

Background:

Closed Fisheries

A closed fishery is a fishery with a set number of licenses held by defined participants. The commercial sea urchin and sea cucumber fisheries have been closed since the year 2000. The Director of the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) is authorized only to issue licenses for these fisheries to individuals who held a license for the fishery in the previous year. The issuance of a license to a new applicant has been prohibited since 2000; therefore, notwithstanding limited exceptions, all holders of a sea urchin or sea cucumber commercial license have held their licenses for at least four consecutive years.

License Buyback

Along with closing the sea urchin and sea cucumber commercial fisheries, the 1999 Legislature also established a program to buyback, or retire, licenses from qualified participants in these fisheries. The DFW is required to use earmarked funds to retire these licenses, if the license holder voluntarily agrees to not renew his or her license the following year. The earmarked funds must be used to retire licenses until the number of fishers participating in either the sea cucumber or sea urchin fishery drops to 25. When that number is achieved, the funds must be used for management and enforcement in the sea urchin or sea cucumber fishery.

Fund Generation

The funds that are earmarked for license retirement are held in the sea urchin dive fishery account and the sea cucumber dive fishery account respectively. Each fishery is assessed a series of fees and taxes that are directed into the appropriate account.

Through the 2005 season, each license renewal for either fishery is assessed a fee of \$100. Since licenses are issued annually, this is in essence an annual fee for the license holders. In addition, a fee of either \$500 or \$2,500 is assessed if the license holder either designates a different person, known as an alternate operator, to fish under his or her license, or if the license holder transfers the license outright to another person.

The two dive accounts also receive revenue from specific excise taxes. For sea cucumbers and sea urchins, the commercial fishers are required to pay in tax the value of their harvest multiplied by 4.6 percent. Of that percentage, 0.543 percent is earmarked for the retirement account for the appropriate fishery, with the remainder being deposited into the general fund. This earmark is set to expire at the end of 2005, and the excise tax paid by commercial sea cucumber and sea urchin fishers is set to be reduced by the amount currently earmarked for the fishery's retirement accounts.

Summary of Bill:

The date when the sea cucumber and sea urchin \$100 licence renewal fee and the portion of the excise tax dedicated to sea cucumber and sea urchin license retirements expires is extended from 2005 until 2010.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: The cucumber and urchin fisheries are significant fisheries in the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Harvested roe is sent to Japan, where it is a delicacy. The buyback program started five years ago, and it is time to reauthorize the program for an additional five years.

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Buck, prime sponsor.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.