

FINAL BILL REPORT

ESSB 6132

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SYNOPSIS AS ENACTED

Brief Description: Modifying shellfish protection.

SPONSORS: Senate Committee on Environment & Natural Resources (originally sponsored by Senators Metcalf, Owen, Oke, M. Kreidler, Snyder and Conner; by request of Puget Sound Water Quality Authority)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT & NATURAL RESOURCES

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

BACKGROUND:

Washington State's coastal and estuarine waters support one of the most productive oyster and clam growing areas in the world. The 1989 shellfish harvest was estimated at a wholesale value of \$52 million. Commercial shellfish growing and processing account for one in 12 jobs in Pacific County; shellfish production is the number two industry in Mason County. Additionally, it is estimated that more than 1.3 million recreational shellfish harvesting trips are taken each year in Puget Sound alone.

Shellfish feed by pumping large amounts of water through their systems. In so doing, they retain harmful bacteria and viruses, which are concentrated at levels estimated tenfold that of the water column. This sensitivity to pollutants makes shellfish an excellent indicator species for the overall health of marine waters. Most shellfish reproduce and grow only in estuaries, where rivers empty to the sea and where wastes from upstream sources ultimately arrive.

Increasing growth and development in upland areas has increased levels of pollutants in shellfish growing waters, resulting in a significant rise in shellfish contamination in the past ten years. A 1991 report indicated that since 1981 the state Department of Health has downgraded the classification of 16,113 acres of commercial shellfish beds, restricting or prohibiting harvest from these areas. More than 40 percent of Puget Sound's commercial shellfish acreage is now closed or restricted, compared to 17 percent in 1980. Fifty-seven of Puget Sound's 146 recreational shellfish beds are closed to harvest, while 35 more are threatened with near-term closure.

Since 1980, failing on-site sewage systems and poor animal keeping practices have been identified as the primary cause of commercial harvest restrictions. Other sources of pollutants

include storm water runoff, outfall from sewage treatment plants, marine mammals, and boat waste.

In 1985 the Legislature authorized local governments to create shellfish protection districts to fund programs to reduce pollutants in shellfish tidelands. However, there has not been a single such special district created under this authority. Additionally, state and local governments administer a variety of programs to address sources of pollutants to the state's waters, including shellfish growing areas. The Puget Sound Water Quality Management Plan contains several initiatives for shellfish protection, such as improved data on shellfish bed conditions, enhanced public education, increased testing on toxicity, and development of a strategy to respond to existing closures of growing areas.

SUMMARY:

Existing laws authorizing the creation of shellfish protection districts are revised. Duplicative provisions of existing law are repealed. The county legislative authority may create the district on its own motion or refer the question to the voters. A district formed on the motion of the county legislative authority is subject to a referendum procedure by the voters within the district. Deadlines are established for filing the petition, for securing signatures of at least 25 percent of the registered voters residing within the district, and for conducting the special election.

The legislative authority shall constitute the governing body of the district and may appoint a local advisory council to assist in developing the implementation of the district's programs. Counties are directed to cooperate with incorporated areas in establishing the districts. Where a portion of a proposed district lies within an incorporated area, the county shall allow the city or town to participate in the boundary determination and in administration of the district's program. If the growing areas are located in more than one county, these counties must coordinate the establishment of the districts.

The county legislative authority has full jurisdiction to fix, alter and control the fees, charges or rates provided under the programs. Funding for district programs may be derived through county tax revenues, fees for services performed, charges or rates, and federal, state or private grants.

Fees, rates or charges for district programs shall not be imposed on properties upon which charges are imposed for other storm water runoff programs. Fees, rates or charges shall not be imposed by districts on the following: (1) confined animal feeding operations subject to the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES); (2) other facilities permitted and assessed fees under the NPDES system; and (3) timberlands classified under state timber and open space tax laws.

Counties forming districts are to receive high priority for state water quality grants and loans for shellfish protection

programs. They are encouraged within available funding to contract with conservation districts to draft plans addressing animal waste pollution. A shellfish protection district must be formed within 180 days after the state Department of Health has closed or downgraded a shellfish growing area because of water quality degradation due to nonpoint pollution.

The state Parks and Recreation Commission is directed to seek the most cost efficient and accessible facilities for boat waste pumpout.

VOTES ON FINAL PASSAGE:

Senate	42	6
House	95	0

EFFECTIVE: June 11, 1992