

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1250

As Reported by House Committee On:
Agriculture & Natural Resources

Title: An act relating to lease rates for marinas on state-owned aquatic lands that provide public moorage.

Brief Description: Determining annual rental rates for the lease of state-owned aquatic lands for qualifying marinas.

Sponsors: Representatives Eickmeyer, Schoesler, Linville, Sump, Quall and Mielke; by request of Commissioner of Public Lands.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Agriculture & Natural Resources: 1/31/03, 2/25/03 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Establishes the rent formula for qualifying marinas as a percentage of a marina's gross revenues, as set by the Department of Natural Resources.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 13 members: Representatives Linville, Chair; Rockefeller, Vice Chair; Schoesler, Ranking Minority Member; Holmquist, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Kristiansen, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Chandler, Eickmeyer, Grant, Hunt, McDermott, Orcutt, Quall and Sump.

Staff: Jason Callahan (786-7117).

Background:

The Legislature has delegated the management of state-owned aquatic lands to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), with directions to encourage public use and access, foster water-dependent uses, ensure environmental protection, and utilize renewable resources. The DNR is further instructed to charge a rent to the users of state-owned aquatic lands, with different standards applying to different use types.

Non-water dependent uses are charged the fair market value for the use of the land. Water dependent uses are charged rent according to a statutory formula.

Water dependent uses, defined as uses that cannot logically exist except on water, are assessed a rent that is associated with upland values. Generally, water dependent uses must pay a rent that is 30 percent of the assessed value of the adjacent upland parcel, plus a real capitalization rate.

The Legislature suspended rent increases for marinas located on state-owned aquatic lands between June 11, 1998 and July 1, 1999. The rent freeze was implemented while the DNR conducted a legislatively-mandated study into other possible rent formulas. The conclusions of the Final Rent Study Report to the Legislature, delivered by the DNR in February of 1999, indicated that at that time there was no consensus for change reached.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The rent formula for qualifying marinas is established as a percentage of a marina's gross revenues. The percentage rate, along with the portions of a marina's revenues that serve as a basis for that rate, will be determined by the DNR and recalculated on an annual basis. The percentage set by the DNR must cover their administrative costs and ensure that the state does not see a revenue loss from current levels. In developing a rent formula, the DNR must account for the income of subleases and concessionaires. The new rent formula will be phased in over 2004, so all marinas will be operating under the new rent formula by January 1, 2005.

By July 1, 2003, and again annually, all marina lessees must submit tax documentation and an income reporting form to the DNR for lease calculation purposes. All income reports are subject to audit and review. If a marina fails to submit appropriate documentation, the DNR may conduct an audit at the marina's expense or cancel the lease.

The minimum amount for a marina lease is set at \$500, plus any administrative costs.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The original bill established the formula for rent increases for certain marinas to be based on the consumer price index for the Seattle-Tacoma-Bremerton area, as published by the United States Department of Labor. All rent increases under the original bill were to be in addition to the base rent, which was defined as the rent in place as of June 30, 2002.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Testimony For: (Original bill) Lease rates for aquatic lands is a returning issue, and this bill clarifies some past objections and offers a fair basis for rent formulation. Over the years, the current rent formulation has increased rent far quicker than the value of marina rent slips has climbed.

This bill is a collaborative effort of many stakeholders that has taken over 12 years to develop. The drafters looked at five different rent formulation models, and given the lack of available information, the model outlined in the bill proved to be the best one for all involved. It provides a clear formula for overworked land managers to help expedite leases.

The bill is a compromise that initially provides revenue neutrality to the state, while providing a financial break to the marina owners over time, allowing them to save and pay their bills into the future.

Boating is an integral part of life in the Northwest and should be supported. By providing lower rent increases, the bill helps to keep moorage affordable for middle-class boaters in the state. No new marinas are being built because it is not a profitable business. A piece of aquatic land has no value without access, and the marinas provide that access.

A decrease in revenue to the state is not a high price to pay for financial predictability to the marina owners. The financial help to rural communities makes up for the decreases in state revenue. Predictability is important for marina owners because marinas cannot be moved and the owners have no control over the valuation and use of the adjacent upland.

Testimony Against: (Original bill) Before marina rents are reduced, such action should be justified. There is a huge demand for boat slips in Washington that exceeds the supply. The cost of a moorage could be high and still be supported by the boating community. The marinas have not shown that they are in the trouble that they suggest. The DNR asked many marina owners to disclose information about revenue and expenditures, and none of them were willing to open their books to justify their economic hardship.

Public lands should not be valued any different from private lands. Market forces should be allowed to control, and the Legislature should not implement artificial controls.

County assessors face complications with using adjacent uplands to establish a base rent.

Neighboring communities can have drastically different values, and the value can be affected by the zoning, size, and type of use applied to the upland parcel. No other land is valued in this manner, and the bill does not address inequity in rent formulas.

The bill could result in less state revenue, which could lead to less money being generated for grant programs that provide funds for public recreational access, aquatic land management, and aquatic land enhancement. Given the state of the state's finances, it is a mistake to take away a revenue source. The bill also reduces funds to local governments that rely on leasehold taxes. The loss of revenue is immediate, and it also will magnify over time.

Testified: (In support) Representative Eickmeyer, prime sponsor; Fran McNair, Department of Natural Resources; Cliff Webster, Northwest Marine Trade Association; Margie Freeman, Association of Independent Moorages; and Neil Falkenburg, Puget Sound Marina Operators;

(Opposed) Michelle Hagen, Washington Association of County Officials; and Bruce Wishart, People for Puget Sound.

(Concerns) Dan Budd, Department of Fish and Wildlife.