

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## HB 1076

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**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
Agriculture & Natural Resources

**Title:** An act relating to rockfish research.

**Brief Description:** Creating a rockfish research program.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Blake, Takko, B. Sullivan and Moeller.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Agriculture & Natural Resources: 1/15/07, 1/22/07 [DPS].

**Brief Summary of Substitute Bill**

- Requires the Department of Fish and Wildlife to conduct research and a stock assessment on rockfish populations in Washington's waters.
- Applies a surcharge on certain fishing licenses to fund rockfish research.
- Creates a new, unappropriated account.

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

**Majority Report:** The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 14 members: Representatives B. Sullivan, Chair; Blake, Vice Chair; Kretz, Ranking Minority Member; Warnick, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Dickerson, Eickmeyer, Grant, Hailey, Kagi, Lantz, McCoy, Newhouse, Orcutt and VanDeWege.

**Minority Report:** Do not pass. Signed by 1 member: Representative Strow.

**Staff:** Jason Callahan (786-7117).

**Background:**

The term rockfish generally includes a number of species of long-lived, bottom-dwelling fish. Like all fishery resources in Washington, the management of the rockfish resource and rockfish fisheries has been delegated to the Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department).

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*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

The Department has taken various actions, including the enactment of fishing limitations, to manage the rockfish fishery in response to concerns that many rockfish populations are currently at a level lower than what is generally considered healthy.

A common tool provided to the Department for managing fisheries is the fishing license. The Department issues various licenses, and combinations of licenses, for both commercial and recreational fishing. Generally, there is a fee associated with the purchase or renewal of a fishing license. In most cases, the license fee is used to help fund the operations and management activities of the Department.

In addition to license fees, which raise revenue for general Department programs, some licenses also require the payment of a surcharge upon purchase or renewal. A surcharge is an additional cost above the fee for the license that is usually earmarked for a specific purpose. For instance, certain shellfish licenses carry a surcharge that raises revenue specifically to fund testing and monitoring for biotoxins.

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### **Summary of Substitute Bill:**

#### Research Mandate

The Department is required to develop and implement a program that will research and conduct a stock assessment of the rockfish populations in the state. The required research includes surveys in both the Puget Sound and coastal waters using new and existing technologies. The surveys must estimate the current abundance and future recovery of species of rockfish and other groundfish.

#### Funding the Research

The required rockfish research is funded through a series of surcharges on licenses offered by the Department. The surcharges will be applied to the sales of the designated licenses until the end of 2010.

Surcharges on commercial licenses are set at \$35. This surcharge applies to the annual fee established for both salmon and non-salmon charter licenses, and to the annual fee for non-limited entry delivery licenses.

In addition, a series of licenses are assigned a surcharge of 50 cents. This surcharge applies to recreational saltwater and combination fishing licenses, as well as to temporary combination fishing licenses.

#### New Account

The revenue generated from the surcharges are to be deposited into the newly created Rockfish Research Account (Account). The Account is unappropriated and expenditures may only be authorized by the Director of the Department.

The revenue in the Account may be used only for rockfish research, including assessment of stocks.

**Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:**

The substitute bill clarifies that the 50 cent rockfish surcharge applies to temporary charter stamps.

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**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Effective Date of Substitute Bill:** This bill takes effect January 1, 2008.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(In support) The Department must manage resources according to the best science available, but there is not enough scientific information known about rockfish populations to make good management decisions. This results in the Department having to err on the side of caution and conservative management. Better information will lead to less conservative management and more fishing opportunities.

There is new technology that takes advantage of remote-operated vehicles to assess rockfish resources in a way that does not disturb the fish. The new technology allows researchers to access the deep waters where rockfish live, but the equipment is very expensive to rent.

Licensed fishers are willing to pay the surcharge so that the Department can have the information it needs to best manage the fishery. It is the fishers who are most impacting the resource and who will most benefit from the improved science base.

(Opposed) None.

**Persons Testifying:** Representative Blake, prime sponsor; Ed Owens, Coalition of Coastal Fisheries and Westport and Ilwaco Charter Boat Fleets; and Morris Barker, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.