

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESSB 6127

As Reported by House Committee On:
Agriculture & Natural Resources

Title: An act relating to improving the management of the state's halibut fishery.

Brief Description: Improving the management of the state's halibut fishery.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks (originally sponsored by Senator Van De Wege).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Agriculture & Natural Resources: 2/14/18, 2/20/18 [DPA].

**Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill
(As Amended by Committee)**

- Establishes a fee of no more than \$5 for a halibut catch record card.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 12 members: Representatives Blake, Chair; Chapman, Vice Chair; Buys, Ranking Minority Member; Dent, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Fitzgibbon, Lytton, Orcutt, Pettigrew, Robinson, Schmick, Stanford and Walsh.

Staff: Rebecca Lewis (786-7339).

Background:

The Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) is responsible for the management of the state's fish and wildlife resources, and establishes basic rules and regulations governing the time, place, manner, and methods used to harvest or enjoy fish and wildlife. As a part of this responsibility, the DFW issues licenses, tags, endorsements, and permits for hunting and fishing in Washington. A person may purchase an annual or temporary freshwater, saltwater, or combination freshwater and saltwater fishing license. Most revenue from licenses, tags,

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and endorsements is directed either to the Wildlife Account or one of several enhancement accounts.

Halibut seasons are set through an annual process conducted at the international, federal, and state level. The International Pacific Halibut Commission sets harvest limits for all regulatory areas, which are shared under a plan developed by the Pacific Fishery Management Council and implemented through federal and state rules. The DFW solicits public input into the season setting process and conducts fishery monitoring and enforcement activities.

By rule, the DFW requires catch reporting on halibut, salmon, steelhead, sturgeon, and Puget Sound crab. In most cases, there is no charge for the first catch record card (CRC). Subsequent CRCs cost \$11 each. There is a statutory fee of \$7.50 for a CRC endorsed for Puget Sound crab when purchased with a combination fishing license.

Summary of Amended Bill:

A fee of no more than \$5 per card is established for the halibut CRC. Catch record cards must be provided at no cost with the purchase of a one-day temporary saltwater fishing license or charter stamp. Funds from the halibut catch record cards must be used for monitoring, management, and expansion of recreational halibut fishery opportunities.

Amended Bill Compared to Engrossed Substitute Bill:

The amendment retains all provisions of the underlying bill with the following changes:

- Halibut CRCs must be provided at no cost to individuals who purchase a one-day temporary saltwater fishing license or charter stamp.
- Halibut CRCs may not cost more than \$5 when purchased with an annual fishing license.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available. New fiscal note requested on February 21, 2018.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) The idea behind this bill is to create a small fee for CRCs so that the DFW can collect more accurate data regarding halibut harvests and ensure as much opportunity for halibut fishing as possible. There is too much guesswork involved in the process to estimate halibut catches. As the recreational opportunities for salmon fishing decrease, more fishers fish for halibut. Halibut fishery management is a multi-agency endeavor. The fishery has

gone from 70 days to four days, and there is a hope that better data could lead to a longer halibut fishery. Almost one-half of the CRCs are issued after the harvest. This is not a new license requirement, and the CRC fee will not replace dock checks. There is no intent to limit how many CRCs may be sold. There is a hope to match the 60 percent crab CRC return rate. Recreational fishing provides economic benefits to the state, particularly to rural communities.

(Opposed) Ilwaco and Westport get accurate counts from dock checks and ocean sampling. In general, there is support for additional funding. The fee could be supported if it applies to Marine Areas 5 through 13 or if the fee was removed for CRCs purchased with charter licenses.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Senator Van De Wege, prime sponsor; Dave Croonquist, Coastal Conservation Association; John Beath, SquidPro Tackle; David Puki; and Randy Jones, Venture Charters; David Reynard; and Michele Culver, Department of Fish and Wildlife.

(Opposed) Jonathan Sawin, Westport Charterboat Association and Ilwaco Charterboat Association.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.