

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1631

As Reported by House Committee On:
State Government & Tribal Relations

Title: An act relating to establishing bull kelp forests as the official state marine forest.

Brief Description: Establishing the state marine forest.

Sponsors: Representatives Nance, Mena, Griffey, Salahuddin, Low, Parshley, Hunt, Walsh, Ramel, Paul, Duerr, Bernbaum, Chase, Peterson, Shavers, Ryu, McEntire, Richards, Reed, Kloba, Simmons, Tharinger, Zahn, Thomas and Timmons.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government & Tribal Relations: 2/4/25, 2/7/25 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Establishes bull kelp forests as the state marine forest.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & TRIBAL RELATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Mena, Chair; Stearns, Vice Chair; Waters, Ranking Minority Member; Walsh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Chase, Doglio and Farivar.

Staff: Connor Schiff (786-7093).

Background:

Bull kelp (*Nereocystis luetkeana*) forests provide numerous animals with nutrients and habitat, including kelp crabs, red sea urchins, sea stars, kelp greenling, kelp perch, and Pacific herring. Kelp forests, along with eelgrass meadows, also play a role in traditional fishing, hunting, and food preparation and storage for some Northwest tribal nations. Bull

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kelp in south and central Puget Sound regions have declined by more than 90 percent in the last 150 years. In 2022 legislation was enacted that requires the Department of Natural Resources to create a statewide Kelp Forest and Eelgrass Meadow Health and Conservation Plan to conserve and restore at least 10,000 acres of kelp forest and eelgrass meadow habitat by 2040.

Bull kelp forests are found along the coast from Alaska to central California. Bull kelp is an annual seaweed, which means it grows from a spore to maturity within a single year. It can reach heights of up to 100 feet and grow at a rate of up to 10 inches per day.

Summary of Bill:

Bull kelp (*Nereocystis luetkeana*) forests are the state marine forest of Washington.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Bull kelp forests are essential to Washington's ecosystems, the marine food chain, and marine biodiversity. Bull kelp forests protect and support animals such as killer whales, otters, and salmon, including juvenile salmon. Bull kelp forests are important to many tribal communities. The forests help combat climate change and ocean acidification by capturing carbon. They are located throughout Puget Sound and are the signature kelp in the Salish Sea. Bull kelp forests are disappearing, which is threatening marine ecosystems, marine animals, and the livelihoods of those who work in the fishing industry. Bull kelp forests are worth a lot to the global economy. Many individuals and organizations are involved with protecting and restoring bull kelp forests, but more people, including young people, need to be involved. Recognition is necessary to bring awareness to the disappearance of bull kelp and involve more people in the protection of bull kelp forests.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Greg Nance, prime sponsor; Eric Von Brandenfels, Puget Sound Pilots; Amy Grondin, Duna Fisheries, LLC; Peter Steelquist, Surfrider Foundation; Sebastian Ford; Jodie Toft, Puget Sound Restoration Fund; and Miguela Marzolf, Seattle Aquarium.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.