

SENATE BILL REPORT

HB 1631

As of March 18, 2025

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: Passed House: 3/4/25, 97-0.

Committee Activity: State Government, Tribal Affairs & Elections: 3/18/25.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Designates bull kelp forests as the state marine forest.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT, TRIBAL AFFAIRS & ELECTIONS

Staff: William Bridges (786-7312)

Background: Having the appearance of a bullwhip, bull kelp—*Nereocystis luetkeana*—is an annual seaweed that can grow up to 100 feet in height. Bull kelp forests are found along the coast from Alaska to central California and are prevalent in the San Juan Islands, Strait of Juan de Fuca, and the Olympic Peninsula. Bull kelp forests, along with eelgrass meadows, provide important habitat for a wide array of marine life, contribute to climate mitigation and adaptation by sequestering carbon and locally reducing ocean acidification impacts, and have important cultural value to Indigenous people of the Northwest by playing a prominent role in traditional fishing, hunting, and food preparation and storage.

The Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has been tracking long-term trends of kelp forests and eelgrass meadows. According to DNR, bull kelp in South and

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Central Puget Sound regions declined by more than 90 percent in the last 150 years. The Legislature, in 2022, required DNR to develop a Native Kelp Forest and Eelgrass Meadow Health and Conservation Prioritization Plan to identify at least 10,000 acres of priority kelp and eelgrass habitat for conservation and restoration by 2040. The prioritization plan was submitted to the Legislature on December 1, 2023.

Summary of Bill: Bull kelp—*Nereocystis luetkeana*—forests are designated as the official marine forest of Washington.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Bull kelp canopies have fostered imagination and play and they create rich ecosystems that support a variety of marine life, including salmon and orcas. Pollution and ocean acidification are killing bull kelp forests and the official designation as the state marine forest is more than a symbolic gesture but a commitment to safeguarding the kelp forests. The state needs to accelerate its goal of preserving 10,000 acres of bull kelp, inspire and mobilize young people to protect the kelp forests, and continue its efforts to restore Puget Sound. Bull kelp has deep cultural significance to tribes. The Port of Seattle and tribes have worked together to safeguard bull kelp forests.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Greg Nance, Prime Sponsor; Tuesday Laxton; Brenda Campbell, Snoqualmie Tribe; Miguela Marzolf, Seattle Aquarium; Julianna Sullivan, Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe; Jodie Toft; Tisa Annette; Katherine Staatz; Andrew Abrahamson; Naleana Gunder.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.