

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESSB 6117

As Reported By House Committee On:
Natural Resources

Title: An act relating to repurchasing commercial salmon fishing licenses.

Brief Description: Creating a salmon license buyback program.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Morton, Snyder, Swecker, Stevens, Rossi and Oke).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Natural Resources: 2/25/98, 2/27/98 [DPA].

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Buck, Chairman; Sump, Vice Chairman; Thompson, Vice Chairman; Regala, Ranking Minority Member; Butler, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Alexander; Anderson; Eickmeyer; Hatfield and Pennington.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 1 member: Representative Chandler.

Staff: Carole Richmond (786-7114).

Background: Commercial salmon fishing and charter boat salmon fishing face serious reductions in fishing opportunities due to declining salmon stocks. This situation has resulted in economic hardship for commercial salmon fishers and charter boat operators.

In 1994, the federal government declared a fishery disaster, and announced a \$15.7 million emergency aid package for Washington, Oregon, and northern California. This aid was directed at alleviating the economic hardship imposed on fishers and communities by the collapse of the coastal salmon fishery. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife administered a federally funded commercial salmon license buy-out program in 1995 and 1996. Only licenses, and not vessels or other fishing gear, are covered by this program.

In 1997, the U.S. Congress provided another \$3.5 million for the purchase of commercial fishing licenses in the federal fiscal year 1997 emergency assistance bill. Unlike in previous years, however, expenditure of these funds is contingent upon a 25 percent match from the state.

Summary of Amended Bill: Reducing commercial salmon harvest in Washington is essential to salmon recovery, as well as to successful negotiation of a new Pacific salmon treaty. To reduce harvest pressure, the purchase of commercial and charter boat salmon fishing licenses is authorized, and the use of no more than 25 percent in state matching funds is authorized for this purpose. License buy-back is authorized only under the condition that the license is purchased for a one-time price and that the license is permanently canceled and removed from the fishery.

Purchase of licenses may take place only on a willing buyer-willing seller basis. A fund is created in the state treasury known as the "salmon commercial fishing license and charter boat reduction fund."

Most of chapter 75.44 RCW is repealed. This is the authority provided in 1975 to purchase fishing licenses, vessels and gear because of harvest reductions for non-tribal fishers caused by court decisions allocating the salmon catch.

Amended Bill Compared to Engrossed Substitute Bill: A finding is added related to the need for commercial salmon and charter boat license purchase by the state of Washington in order to successfully negotiate a new United States-Canada Pacific salmon treaty and achieve harvest reductions.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available. New fiscal note requested on February 24, 1998.

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

Testimony For: The state of Washington needs to be in a position to negotiate with the Canadians on harvest reductions in Washington state. In order to reduce Canadian harvest of Washington stocks, Washington needs to reduce its harvest of Fraser river stocks.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Barb Lindsay, Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association (pro); Allan Hollingsworth, Grays Harbor Gillnetters (pro); Ed Owens, Coalition of Coastal Fisheries, Purse Seine Vessel Owners, and Puget Sound Gillnetters Association (pro with concerns); and Frank Urabeck, Northwest Marine Trade Association.