

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SJM 8004

As Reported by House Committee On:
Agriculture & Ecology

Brief Description: Petitioning Congress to appropriate support for an oil spill prevention tugboat in the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

Sponsors: Senators Spanel, Swecker, Patterson, Hargrove, Costa, Eide, Fraser, Thibaudeau, Franklin, Regala, Gardner, Prentice, Kline, Kohl-Welles and Haugen.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Agriculture & Ecology: 2/21/02 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Petitions the United States Congress to appropriate funds to support a permanently stationed oil spill prevention tugboat in the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & ECOLOGY

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 12 members: Representatives Linville, Chair; Hunt, Vice Chair; Schoesler, Ranking Minority Member; Cooper, Delvin, Dunshee, Grant, Holmquist, Kirby, Quall, Roach and Sump.

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

Staff: Jason Callahan (786-7117).

Background:

The 2001 budget appropriated \$1.7 million to the Department of Ecology (DOE) to fund an oil spill prevention rescue tugboat in the Strait of Juan de Fuca. The tug *Barbara Foss* was commissioned and began duty at Neah Bay on September 15, 2001. It is scheduled to remain on site throughout the winter storm season, which will be at least 200 days. The Neah Bay rescue tug has been called 18 times over the current and last three winter seasons, actively towing or escorting multiple vessels.

The North Puget Sound Long-Term Oil Spill Risk Management Panel, which met

monthly from September 1999 to July 2000 to develop an oil spill risk management plan, considered the costs and benefits of a permanently stationed, federally funded rescue tug at Neah Bay. Three-fourths of the panel members voted in support of the tug; however, it was not included in the final recommendations because panel ground rules required a consensus of the members to endorse a proposal. The tug proposal received four "nay" votes, so it did not pass.

Under the existing situation, the tug will end its duty in May. The annual cost of a permanent rescue tug has been estimated by the DOE to be approximately \$2.5 million.

Summary of Bill:

The Washington State Senate and House of Representatives requests the United States Congress to appropriate sufficient funds to support a permanently stationed oil spill prevention tugboat at the westward end of the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not Requested.

Testimony For: Washington depends on its marine waters for its economy and for its quality of life. The areas within the patrol of the Neah Bay rescue tug are delicate environmentally, and subject to heavy, and increasing, vessel traffic. The areas are also subject to high winds and seas, heavy current, and rugged coastlines. These conditions make transit through the Strait of Juan de Fuca hazardous, and cleaning up a potential oil spill very difficult. There is an accident waiting to happen in the Strait, and when it does, the clean up will cost millions of dollars. The recent rescue activities of the tug makes it hard to argue that the tug is not needed.

The United States Coast Guard has estimated that the risk of an oil spill in the Strait of Juan de Fuca is increasing, although the risk of a spill from an oil tanker is decreasing. The nearest rescue capabilities from Neah Bay and the mouth of the Strait is in Port Angeles, some 70 miles into the Strait. Several stakeholder groups have concluded that a tug in northern Puget Sound was a wise investment.

Federal funding is appropriate. If an oil spill were to occur, the federal government would have some responsibility in cleaning it up, so they should help with the prevention. Funding should not come from United States Coast Guard, since their budget is already constrained. Funding for the tug should come from a wide class of water users, or from a public source.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: (In support) Dale Jensen, Department of Ecology; Stan Norman, Department of Ecology; Greg Hanon, Western States Petroleum Association; and Bruce Wishart, People for Puget Sound.