

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2484

As Reported by House Committee On:

Natural Resources

Title: An act relating to the creation of a license plate emblem to benefit orca whale research.

Brief Description: Creating a license plate emblem to benefit orca whale research.

Sponsors: Representatives Morris, Barlean, Anderson, Linville, Doumit, Van Luvan and Ogden.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Natural Resources: 2/1/02, 2/6/02 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Directs the Department of Licensing to establish agreements with businesses and nonprofit organizations to conduct sales of orca whale research emblems to the general public for placement on vehicle license plates. Proceeds from the sales are used for orca whale research.
- Authorizes the whale museum in Friday Harbor, Washington to select the design to be used for the orca whale research emblem.
- The Department of Fish and Wildlife awards grants for orca whale research on a competitive request-for-proposal process.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Doumit, Chair; Rockefeller, Vice Chair; Ericksen, Jackley, McDermott, Pearson and Upthegrove.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 4 members: Representatives Sump, Ranking Minority Member; Buck, Eickmeyer and Orcutt.

Staff: Bill Lynch (786-7092).

Background:

The Department of Licensing (DOL) issues veterans emblems that may be purchased and attached to license plates. The fee charged for these emblems must be established at a level to offset the costs associated with the production and administration of the program. The emblems are produced by correctional industries.

The decline in the orca whale population for certain whalepods has raised some concern because whales act as an indicator species within their environment. Supporters of orca whale research could raise money for this purpose if license plate emblems were available for this purpose.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The DOL is required to establish agreements with businesses and nonprofit organizations to sell orca whale research emblems to the general public. The DOL sells the emblems in bulk to participating businesses and nonprofit organizations, who in turn, sell them to people for placement on their vehicle license plates. Proceeds from the sales are distributed as grants for orca whale research.

The DOL is directed to adopt fees in an amount that offsets the cost of producing the emblems and which provides funds for orca whale research. The amount of the emblem may not exceed \$25. The whale museum in Friday Harbor selects the design of the orca whale research emblem.

The orca whale research account is created as a non-appropriated account. The account is subject to allotment procedures. Expenditures from the account may only be used for the costs of producing the orca whale research emblems, the costs of administration by the DOL and the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW), and for orca whale research grants awarded by the DFW.

The DFW must administer a grant program for orca whale research by Washington state researchers for J-K-L whalepods in the Salish Sea. The grants must be awarded on a competitive request-for-proposal process. The DFW is required to adopt necessary policies and rules to establish the application process, the criteria for evaluating the applications, and for monitoring the activities of the grant recipients.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The requirements for the DOL to sell orca whale research emblems directly to the general public, and to include information of the availability of these emblems with the notices of license plate tab renewals are deleted. Instead, the DOL is directed to enter into agreements with businesses and nonprofits. Under the agreements the department

would sell the emblems to participating entities in bulk, and these entities would sell them to the general public. The contest for the design of the emblem is deleted, and replaced with the emblem design being selected by the whale museum in Friday Harbor.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: Some cost-saving measures could be added to the bill. Emblems are cheap to produce whereas license plates cost about \$5 per plate to produce. Florida raises about \$3 million in revenue from its manatee and dolphin plates. Orca whales are tremendously popular throughout this state. In one year one million people visited the whale museum in Friday Harbor. Non-profit groups are willing to advertise this program and lend assistance. These proceeds will allow additional federal funds to be leveraged. Researchers in Washington worked with the Free Willy– movie people and are respected for their research. This is also a salmon recovery bill and a bottom fish recovery bill because the research will also benefit both groups of fish. We have reached the point where a real decline in orca populations is taking place, and we don't know the reasons. Blubber samples that were collected seven years ago and frozen are finally being analyzed. Whale-watch operators are being affected because the public doesn't know if whale-watching activities harms the whales. Whale-watching draws about one-half million people to the area«which is comparable to the Seattle Seahawks.

(With concerns) The administrative costs could exceed the revenues from the program.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: (In support) Representative Morris, prime sponsor; Representative Linville; Fred Felleman, Orca Conservancy; Will Anderson, Orca Recovery Campaign « Earth Island Institute; David Bain, Ph.D., Friday Harbor Labs; and Kelley Balcomb-Bartok, Orca Conservancy and Center for Whale Research.

(In support, with concerns) Steve Pozzanhera, Department of Fish and Wildlife.

(Neutral) Lynda Henriksen; Department of Licensing.