

SENATE BILL REPORT

SJM 8004

As Passed Senate, February 8, 2002

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: Environment, Energy & Water: 1/18/01, 2/1/01 [DP].

Passed Senate: 3/12/01, 40-9; 2/8/02, 44-4.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT, ENERGY & WATER

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Fraser, Chair; Regala, Vice Chair; Eide, Hale and Morton.

Staff: Richard Rodger (786-7461)

Background: The Strait of Juan de Fuca covers the marine waters located between the state of Washington and Canada. The marine vessel traffic through the strait is projected, by the United States Coast Guard, to increase in volume by 50 percent from the year 2000 to the year 2025. Additionally, the volume of petroleum transported in the region is projected to increase substantially in the near future. The growth in commercial vessel transits and the increased petroleum movement increases the risk of an oil spill in this region.

The federal government is recognized as having many interests in these marine waters. Those interests include: the international relationship with Canada, the trustee responsibility related to the Olympic National Marine Sanctuary and the Olympic National Park, the protection of tribal treaty rights, the federally designated threatened and endangered species, the federal use of the waters for its naval operations, and the stabilization of the energy resources for the western states.

At the present time, there is a rescue tugboat stationed in Neah Bay, at the western end of the strait, for the purpose of oil spill prevention. At the present time the tugboat is funded solely by Washington State and is projected to be in service for approximately 200 days, starting September 15, 2001.

It is suggested that the federal government should share the expense of stationing an oil spill prevention tugboat in these waters.

Summary of Bill: Congress is requested to appropriate sufficient money to support a permanently stationed and adequately-sized oil spill prevention tugboat, with rescue, fire fighting, spill response, and lifesaving capabilities, at the westward end of the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Testimony For: The region west of Port Angeles presents special risks of oil spills. Those risk factors include: the vessels do not have a Washington State pilot on board, there are no escort tugs required for oil tankers, there are few unencumbered capable tugs in the region, and there can be very poor weather and sea conditions. Three-fourths of the North Puget Sound Oil Spill Risk Management Panel members voted to support the placement of a permanent tug at Neah Bay. The current tug has been dispatched, by the Coast Guard, on eight occasions, resulting in five tows or assists.

Testimony Against: This tug proposal only focuses on a narrow region of the state. It is designed to only address one risk, the risk of drift grounding. It doesn't help in the case of collision or powered groundings. The state has never had an oil spill related to a drift grounding. The money would be better spent investing in different resources. Those resources could include additional high tech buoys, an enhanced automated information system, and a pool of money made available to the Coast Guard, allowing them to assess different risks in different waterways, and deploy tugs in different areas, as needed.

Testified: Senator Harriet Spanel (prime sponsor); Joe Stohr, Spills Program Manager, DOE (pro); Bruce Wishart, People for Puget Sound (pro); Randy Ray, Puget Sound Steamship Owners Association.