

SB 6610-S - DIGEST

(DIGEST OF PROPOSED 1ST SUBSTITUTE)

Finds that Puget Sound and the other waters of Washington state contain an abundance of varied and unique marine life and other natural attractions that are of interest to divers and other recreationalists from all over the world.

Finds that in addition to the usual benefits from tourism, the promotion of underwater viewing tourism in the waters of Washington state will enhance efforts to protect Puget Sound by assisting in educating residents and nonresidents as to the value of the marine environment.

Finds that Washington state's efforts to promote nature-based tourism should include the natural wonder of underwater Washington.

Finds that, in several locations throughout the world, the use of ships as dive attractions has helped promote underwater viewing tourism. To the extent funds are made available, the department of fish and wildlife shall commission an independent study on the use of ships as dive attractions. The department of fish and wildlife, the department of natural resources, the state parks and recreation commission, the department of ecology, and the department of community, trade, and economic development shall establish a work group on the use of ships as dive attractions to delineate elements of this study. Among the topics that the study should address are: (1) Assessing the availability of appropriate locations in Puget Sound at the appropriate depths after the elimination of existing areas reserved for shipping lanes, shellfish beds, sensitive areas, areas with water quality concerns that would preclude placement of a vessel, commercial fishing areas, and areas with restrictions due to national security concerns or national defense activity;

(2) What are the possible long-term environmental consequences, including those to habitat and marine life, of the use of ships as dive attractions, and what steps would need to be taken prior to the state allowing the sinking of a ship to be used as a dive attraction. At a minimum, this should include an assessment of: (a) Water quality impacts and the residual impacts to the underlying land, over time, as the vessel breaks down, such as accumulation of contaminants in the sediment; (b) potential impacts that sinking a ship would have on predation of juvenile salmonid and other state or federally listed species;

(3) What are the possible long-term economic consequences and what are the costs, both capital and operating, of the use of ships as dive attractions, including the costs of cleaning a ship to appropriate environmental standards;

(4) What funding would need to be secured prior to the state allowing the sinking of a ship to be used as a dive attraction and what sources of funding are, or can be made, available for this purpose; and

(5) What are the legal liabilities and exposures for the state in using ships as dive attractions.

Provides that, once the study is complete, the work group shall develop final recommendations based on its findings, to be submitted to the appropriate committees of the legislature no later than December 15, 2007.