

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2654

As Reported by House Committee On:
Environment

Title: An act relating to codifying the existence of the climate impacts group without making modifications to its current mission.

Brief Description: Codifying the existence of the climate impacts group without making modifications to its current mission.

Sponsors: Representatives Seaquist and Pollet.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Environment: 1/31/14, 2/5/14 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Codifies the existence of the Climate Impacts Group, to be housed at the University of Washington.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Fitzgibbon, Chair; Senn, Vice Chair; Short, Ranking Minority Member; Kagi, Morris, Nealey and Tharinger.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 3 members: Representatives Pike, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Harris and Overstreet.

Staff: Jason Callahan (786-7117).

Background:

The Climate Impacts Group (CIG) is an existing interdisciplinary research group housed in the College of the Environment at the University of Washington (UW). The focus of the group is to study the impacts of natural climate variability and global climate change. The CIG considers climate impacts at spatial scales ranging from local communities to the entire

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western U.S. region, with a focus on the Pacific Northwest. According to the CIG, the research focuses on the intersection of climate science, public policy, and resource management.

Although the Legislature has used the budgeting process to commission work of the CIG in the past, the CIG does not receive direct financial support from the UW or the state budget. The existence of the CIG is not codified in state statutes.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The CIG is officially recognized in statute as a unit housed within the UW. Although housed in the UW, the UW is not required to maintain or provide direct financial support to the CIG. The CIG is directed to strive to serve as a centralized, interdisciplinary resource for the State of Washington to study and assist in the understanding of the effects and impacts of natural climate variability and global climate change by focusing on the intersection of climate science, public policy, and resource management.

Enumerated examples of this charge include pursuing coordinated research and education related to climate risks and opportunities for various sectors in Washington, serving as a credible and expert source of climate information for state and local decision makers, and supporting state agencies and local governments in developing strategies to prepare for, and to respond to, the effects of climate variability and change on natural and human systems.

The CIG is expected to maintain specific areas of focus. These include water resources, the potential impacts of sea level rise, natural and managed ecosystems, and an evaluation of the economic, ecological, and societal dimensions of climate risks, opportunities, and response strategies in both the rural and urban environments. The results of any research funded by the state that is undertaken by the CIG must be available to all industries and citizens of the State of Washington. Those results must be paired with the identification of sources relied upon in their development and individuals outside of the CIG who contributed to the research.

When appropriate to achieving its purposes, the CIG must cooperate and coordinate with other entities to fulfill its objectives. These entities include other universities, governmental agencies at all levels, public advocacy organizations, tribal governments, and domestic or foreign business institutions. State agencies and local governments are encouraged to contract with the CIG to fulfill agency needs regarding the collection, storage, integration, analysis, dissemination, interpretation, application, and monitoring of climate change information, research, and training.

The CIG is permitted to solicit gifts, grants, conveyances, bequests, and other devices to aid it in carrying out its mission. The CIG may also solicit contracts for work, financial and in-kind contributions, and support from private industries, interest groups, and federal, state, and tribal governmental sources. The CIG may utilize separately appropriated funds of the UW for the climate impacts group operations and activities.

The Director of the CIG may appoint and maintain a stakeholder advisory committee to advise the Director on policies for the CIG. Any such committee must represent, to the extent possible, the various interests concerned with the work of the CIG. Members of any advisory committee must serve without salary or other compensation, but may be reimbursed for travel expenses.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill clarifies that the committee that may be organized by the CIG is a stakeholder committee and not a policy committee; clarifies that work of the CIG must be made available for the general public only when funded by the state and that the contributing individuals and information sources must be identified; adds a new focus area for the CIG: natural and managed ecosystems; clarifies that the CIG does not implement policy and management changes related to climate; acknowledges that the CIG relies on regional information developed by other sources; and makes other technical changes to match the language in the bill with the current practices of the CIG.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) The CIG has been housed at the UW since 1995 and has, in that time, been providing impartial, hard science related to climate variability and adaptation. Codifying the existence of the CIG will help identify it as the resource that it is and increase awareness of the services it provides. Codification will also broaden the exposure of the state's university system in general as a resource for addressing difficult problems.

The CIG serves as a network of researchers and technical experts, is able to leverage federal investments in climate research, and is part of the United States Department of the Interior's Northwest Climate Center. The Legislature has even tasked the CIG with research assignments in the past and information delivered by the CIG is routinely used by state and local agencies in their decision making processes.

Washington is fortunate to have an entity like the CIG to provide locally relevant information presented in a manner that is accessible to a lay person. Their research is relied upon by both state agencies and nongovernmental organizations. The CIG is seen as credible on all sides of the climate issue.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Amy Snover, University of Washington Climate Impacts Group; Hedia Adelman, Washington Department of Ecology; and Mo McBroom, The Nature Conservancy.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.