

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6145

As of January 23, 2014

Title: An act relating to declaring the *Ostrea lurida* the official oyster of the state of Washington.

Brief Description: Declaring the *Ostrea lurida* the official oyster of the state of Washington.

Sponsors: Senators Hatfield, Roach, Chase, Sheldon, Fraser and McAuliffe.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Governmental Operations: 1/23/14.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS

Staff: Samuel Brown (786-7470)

Background: The state of Washington confers the official designation on various flora, fauna, performing arts, minerals, and tartan. The official fauna are designated as the orca, the official marine mammal; the Olympic marmot, the official endemic mammal; the willow goldfinch, the official bird; the steelhead trout, the official fish; and the common green darner dragonfly, the official insect.

The *Ostrea lurida*, commonly known as the Olympia oyster, is the only oyster native to Washington. Its natural habitat includes rocks in areas near the expanse of the low tide, and mudflats and gravel bars in estuaries and bays. Olympia oysters are flat oysters whose shells average 5-8 cm, or 2-3 inches, long. Olympia oysters play an important ecological role by regulating plankton blooms, decreasing the potential for Red Tide and other harmful algal blooms, and balancing nutrient input in the water.

Summary of Bill: The *Ostrea lurida*, or Olympia oyster, is declared the official oyster of the state of Washington.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: The *ostrea lurida* stands as a living symbol of Washington's history, from the earliest settlers to the present day, and deserves protection as our native oyster. It was eaten for thousands of years by coastal and inland tribes and has a nationwide reputation as a delicacy. Pioneers created an oyster-gathering industry that supplied the California Gold Rush. The oyster is inextricably linked to our state capital: Olympia residents travelled the state with barrels of the oysters, helping gain favor for Olympia as state capital. As a result of overfishing, what was once a gathering business has now become a farming industry. Pollution around oyster beds led Washington farmers to fight for the earliest clean water regulations. The Pacific Coast Shellfish Growers support this bill.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Claire Thompson, citizen; Jim Jesernig, Pacific Coast Shellfish Growers.