

Environment Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5141

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF CERTAIN FISH SPECIES.

Vote Date: 3/4/2022

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 2/25/2022

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Environment Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

To protect and limit the number of certain forage fish species and prevent large scale commercial fisheries.

JFS Language – LCO 2691

Changed section of statues to be amended and clarified that it is per trip limit and moved provision establishing similar limit for bait shop owners.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Katie Dykes, Commissioner Department of Energy and Environmental Protection

Deep supports the bill with a proposed revision: No person while on the waters of this state or any parcel of land, structure or portion of a roadway abutting the waters of this state shall possess or land more than two hundred pounds of the following species: (1) tidewater silverside, (2) Atlantic silverside, (3) sand lance or sand eel, or (4) bay anchovy.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Peter Auster, Senior Research Scientist, Mystic Aquarium

The goal of the bill is to prevent development of large-scale commercial fisheries for forage fish species which are a subset of species managed as bait fish. These species are critical components of the Long Island Sound ecosystem. I would suggest deletion of section 2 and focus only on catch and landings.

Keith Cagle, President, Friends of Connecticut Sportsman

We support the bill but urge the Committee to make two changes to the bill as specified by the Fisheries Advisory Council.

Patrick Comins, Executive Director, The Ct Audubon Society

The Audubon Society supports any effort to restore populations of forage fish in Long Island Sound. The Sound holds the potential to serve as key habitat for such fish species. There are many economic benefits of a robust recreational fishery and nature exploration on Long Island Sound.

William Hyatt, Vice-Chair, Connecticut Fisheries Advisory Council

This bill is a proactive conservation measure to ensure the forage fish population remains abundant in the state. The proposed possession limits will not limit or reduce their current harvest rather will constrain future increases to ensure long-term sustainability. FAC does have two suggestions.

1. Incorporate into Section 26-127 (Conservation of Bait Species) instead of 26-142a
2. Remove Section 2 of this bill pertaining to bait dealers.

Robert LaFrance, Audubon Connecticut

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NORA) defines forage fish as a small schooling species that serves as prey for larger fish as well as marine mammals and sea birds. In recent years many marine fishery councils have recognized the importance of forage fish as part of the marine ecosystem. Establishing a 200 pound trip limit will accommodate any small-scale commercial bait harvesting activity that may be occurring on beach seines or other similar gear.

Bill Lucey, Long Island Soundkeeper, Save the Sound

This proactive bill ensures that four species of forage fish are protected from potential future overharvest. These species are currently unmanaged with little information on their status aside from harvest reports and past surveys. Current records indicate that the existing bait fishing practices will not be affected. Section 2 is unnecessary and could cause confusion for bait dealers. The rainbow smelt, a forage fish, is already in decline. Even though there is no evidence that overharvest is the culprit it is important to manage and protect forage species.

Jason Patlis, President, CEO, The Maritime Aquarium

We support protecting forage fish but with some changes. Healthy forage fish populations are necessary for sustainable and productive ocean and coastal ecosystems and are currently under extreme pressure due to habitat loss. We recommend that Section 2 be deleted from the and defer to the formulation proposed by DEEP.

Jonah Lipar and Gary Sylvestre

Submitted testimony is support of the bill.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None expressed

Reported by: Pamela Bianca

Date: March 17, 2022