

Environment Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-6484

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING CERTAIN HARVESTING OF HORSESHOE CRABS.

Vote Date: 2/17/2023

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 1/30/2023

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Environment Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

To provide protection for the shoreline, birds and other wildlife by protecting the horseshoe crab.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Katie Dykes, Commissioner, Department of Energy and Environmental Protection:

Commissioner Dykes testified that the horseshoe crab should be protected but is concerned that this change would implement a commercial fishery moratorium. DEEP remains neutral.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

William Hyatt, Vice Chair, Connecticut Fisheries Advisory Council:

William Hyatt testified that the Fisheries Advisory Council supports the bill but believe additional investment is needed to fully achieve the bill's goal. Fishery closures have been applied to conserve and recover and FAC agrees that this approach is what is needed for the horseshoe crab.

Deanna Broderick, Guilford, Project Limulus:

Deanna testified that as living fossils who have existed nearly unchanged are disappearing from Long Island Sound. Hand harvesting of the breeding population is a cause of the decline and even though there are only 12 permits allowed there are thousands harvested illegally. Horseshoe crabs are an important part of the food web for migratory birds and other wildlife.

Nathan Frohling, Director, The Nature Conservancy:

Nathan Frohling testified that TNC's mission is to conserve the lands and waters. The horseshoe crab helps sustain the ecological shoreline. Connecticut's quota for annual harvesting is too high. TNC would like that number lowered to help in the restoration of the horseshoe crab.

Ann Gadwah, Outreach Organizer, Sierra Club Connecticut:

Ann Gadwah testified that there was a point in recent memory where the horseshoe crab has all but disappeared. The female population is a fraction of what it was ten years ago. Usually harvested for bait that there are alternatives readily available. The loss of the horseshoe crab affects migrating birds and many other types of wildlife.

Jason Patlis, President and CEO, The Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk.

Mr. Patlis testified about this critical Long Island Sound species facing multiple man-made threats. As a multi-use species with the biomedical industry, commercial fishing industry, habitats for various smaller animal species and shorebirds the decline poses a threat to many.

Nicole Rivard, Government Relations Manager, Friends of Animals:

Nicole Rivard testified that as an international animal advocacy organization wildlife and critical habitat protection is the core of our mission. FoA encourages Connecticut to follow New Jersey and ban the senseless killing of these animals. This bill moves forward without a carve out for the pharmaceutical industry that no longer needs their blood because scientists have already created a compound.

Patrick Comins, Executive Director, The Connecticut Audubon Society:

Patrick Comins testified that the Audubon Society believes that closing the horseshoe crab fisheries is a prudent and appropriate response to the problem. Eliminating bait harvesting is the only tool for addressing the ongoing decline in the crab population. Connecticut has already implemented harvest restrictions in some areas but to recover a moratorium is the only course of action.

Robert LaFrance, Director of Policy, Audubon Connecticut:

Mr. LaFrance included in his testimony a chart from DEEP of the horseshoe crab landings in the state. The Audubon Connecticut is pleased to see that the exception for the collection of blood has been removed and the commissioner will authorize the hand-harvesting by permit for educational or scientific purposes but suggested these additions:

Adequate Staff to monitor the population

Accurate assessment of the coastal areas where horseshoe crabs spawn and deposit their egg

Proper enforcement of any prohibition.

Annie Hornish, Senior State Director, The Humane Society of the United States:

Annie Hornish testified that the largest animal protection organization supports the prohibition of hand-harvesting horseshoe crabs or their eggs. At the moment DEEP manages a permitting process for the harvesting of horseshoe crabs but the Humane Society proposes amending the language to remove DEEPs issuing of permits for scientific purposes for endotoxin testing. There are other synthetic alternatives to this procedure.

MaryEllen Mateleska, Senior Director of Education and Conservation, Mystic Aquarium:

Ms. Mateleska testified that for over 15 years Mystic Aquarium has partnered with community organizations to protect and conserve the horseshoe crab population and habitat. As both demand for these animals and mortality increase we must work to ensure that the population remains stable.

Scott Smith, Friends of Animals:

Scott Smith testified in favor of the bill and included a letter to Commissioner Dykes from Jennifer Mattei a professor from Sacred Heart University who has been researching horseshoe crabs for over 20 years.

Over 50 people also testified in support of the bill

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None Expressed

Reported by: Pamela Bianca

Date: February 23, 2023