



House of Representatives

General Assembly

File No. 189

February Session, 2024

Substitute House Bill No. 5229

House of Representatives, April 2, 2024

The Committee on Environment reported through REP. GRESKO of the 121st Dist., Chairperson of the Committee on the part of the House, that the substitute bill ought to pass.

AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EELGRASS WORKING GROUP.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

1 Section 1. (NEW) (*Effective from passage*) Not later than January 1,
2 2025, the members of the eelgrass working group, as constituted
3 pursuant to special act 23-7, shall reconvene to review the output of the
4 Eelgrass Collaborative related to permitting and policies surrounding
5 restoration of eelgrass in the state and review the attendant report
6 generated by the Eelgrass Collaborative. The working group shall
7 review the existing regulations under the United States Army Corps of
8 Engineers permits to evaluate any potential future modifications and
9 the need for similar modifications of the Department of Energy and
10 Environmental Protection's and the Department of Agriculture's Bureau
11 of Aquaculture's policies.

12 Sec. 2. (NEW) (*Effective from passage*) The Department of Energy and
13 Environmental Protection, in collaboration with the Department of
14 Agriculture's Bureau of Aquaculture and The University of Connecticut,

15 shall identify an individual to serve as the Connecticut Seagrass
 16 Coordinator. Such coordinator shall oversee and interact with
 17 stakeholders associated with eelgrass in Connecticut, Long Island
 18 Sound and the broader eelgrass community. The coordinator shall: (1)
 19 Work with the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to
 20 develop policies and strategies for the sustainable harvesting of eelgrass
 21 seeds from existing Connecticut eelgrass meadows in order to utilize
 22 such seeds in eelgrass meadow restoration projects; (2) research, review
 23 and compile best management practices for conducting aquaculture in
 24 close proximity to eelgrass meadows; (3) prescribe eelgrass-friendly
 25 mooring systems in mooring fields with a high potential to host
 26 eelgrass, as predicted by the Eelgrass Habitat Suitability Index model
 27 and identify necessary attendant public awareness campaigns for use of
 28 such mooring systems; and (4) establish an appropriate set of metrics for
 29 the evaluation of any restoration efforts made by the state to yield a
 30 reasonable return on investment for such projects over the requisite
 31 period of time for any such project.

This act shall take effect as follows and shall amend the following sections:		
Section 1	<i>from passage</i>	New section
Sec. 2	<i>from passage</i>	New section

ENV *Joint Favorable Subst.*

The following Fiscal Impact Statement and Bill Analysis are prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and do not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose. In general, fiscal impacts are based upon a variety of informational sources, including the analyst's professional knowledge. Whenever applicable, agency data is consulted as part of the analysis, however final products do not necessarily reflect an assessment from any specific department.

OFA Fiscal Note**State Impact:** None**Municipal Impact:** None**Explanation**

The bill is not anticipated to result in a fiscal impact to the state or municipalities. The eelgrass working group has sufficient expertise to carry out the required activities, and it is anticipated that the new Seagrass Coordinator role can be assumed by existing Department of Agriculture staff.

The Out Years**State Impact:** None**Municipal Impact:** None

OLR Bill Analysis**sHB 5229****AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EELGRASS WORKING GROUP.****SUMMARY**

This bill requires the eelgrass working group convened under Special Act 23-7 to reconvene by January 1, 2025, for specified purposes. It also requires the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) to select a Connecticut Seagrass Coordinator. DEEP must do this with the Department of Agriculture's (DoAg) Bureau of Aquaculture and UConn.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

WORKING GROUP

The bill requires the reconvened working group to review the (1) Eelgrass Collaborative's work on permitting and eelgrass restoration policies in Connecticut (see BACKGROUND) and (2) U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' existing permit regulations to evaluate future changes and the need to make similar changes to DEEP's and DoAg's policies.

CONNECTICUT SEAGRASS COORDINATOR

Under the bill, the coordinator must generally oversee and interact with those in the eelgrass community and do the following:

1. work with DEEP to develop ways to sustainably harvest eelgrass seeds from existing Connecticut eelgrass meadows for use in restoration projects;
2. research, review, and compile best management practices for aquaculture operations near eelgrass meadows;

3. specify eelgrass-friendly mooring systems in mooring fields with a high potential to host eelgrass (as predicted by the Eelgrass Habitat Suitability Index model) and identify public awareness campaigns for use of the systems; and
4. establish metrics for evaluating the state’s eelgrass restoration efforts to determine a reasonable return on investment.

BACKGROUND

Eelgrass Collaborative

The Long Island Eelgrass Collaborative is a bi-state eelgrass working group formed in 2023 to bring together scientists, practitioners, and other stakeholders to evaluate eelgrass management in Long Island Sound and advance the knowledge of and practical application of eelgrass restoration in the region. The collaborative is funded by the Long Island Sound Study and facilitated by UConn’s Connecticut National Estuarine Research Reserve.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Environment Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 34 Nay 0 (03/15/2024)