

Environment Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-7170

AN ACT CONCERNING CERTAIN RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE

Title: DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE REGARDING AQUACULTURE.

Vote Date: 3/24/2025

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/17/2025

File No.: 630

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Environment Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

The shellfish industry is an important part of the state's economy with over \$30 million in annual sales supporting many jobs and shoreline communities, as well as playing a role in the tourism and the restaurant industry in the state. Maintaining a vibrant and well-regulated aquaculture industry generally and shellfish fishery specifically is critical to the health and success of shellfish population, beds and industry. Currently, there are concerns around overfishing and the protection of marine ecosystems threatened by dredging and uncertainty about the licensing thereof. Due to the crucial importance of the shellfish industry to Connecticut's economy, preserving its long-term health of the fishery and industry is essential, requiring close attention. Shellfish also play a vital role in protecting public health and maintaining healthy marine ecosystems.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Bryan Hurlburt, Commissioner, CT Department of Agriculture (DoAg)

The Department of Agriculture (DoAg) supports H.B. 7170. DoAg highlights the main goals throughout the seven sections of the bill. Section 1 which would remove (1) "unnecessary language as the combined Shellfish Harvest and Relay License allows market activity which must occur and be concluded prior to any movement or relay of contaminated fish", and (2) restrictions that are "impermissible" to harvest tag information. The general goals of sections 2-4 set out to revise the oyster harvest season. It is suggested that there needs to be an additional 35-day grace period to prevent any disturbance to oysters as there is a trend that such animals are spawning earlier. Section 5 has it that there would be added language to ensure that ground owners and franchise holders of shellfish follow "business and shellfish

related state tax filings" that are submitted to DoAg to ensure they are able to operate. Section 6 sets "additional language that grants appeal rights for reversions of franchises and ownership of shellfish beds occurring pursuant to C.G.S. 26-207 in section 5". Section 7 sets that there needs to be a weight increase on the dredge limit as there had been legislation passed in 1967 adding a limit on capacity to 1.5 bushel, and now the weight limit needs to be increased to keep up with current standards. By setting this limit an effort is being made to "to reduce resource impacts on the natural beds where juvenile seed oysters are caught". Lastly, section 8 would repeal language in regard to a recovery vessel named John Volk as it has been sold to a Connecticut "shellfish operation" who will remodel it into a modern vessel, retaining its name.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

One Resident submitted testimony in support of H.B. 7170

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None expressed.

Reported by: Joshua Dontigney

Date: 4/3/2025