

Environment Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-63

AN ACT CONCERNING THE MITIGATION OF EFFECTS ON WILDLIFE AND

Title: FISHERIES FROM FUTURE OFFSHORE WIND PROJECTS.

Vote Date: 2/19/2025

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 1/31/2025

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Environment Committee

CO-SPONNSORS:

Sen. Sommers, 18th Dist.

Rep. Wood, 29th Dist.

Rep. Bumgardner, 41st Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL

To require the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to adopt regulations regarding the mitigation of future offshore wind project proposals on wildlife and fisheries.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Katie Sykes, Commissioner, Department of Energy & Environmental Protection

DEEP Opposes SB 63. They believe that federal and state energy procurement processes provide ample opportunity to implement robust mitigation measures. Also, a regional offshore wind mitigation fund is under development, in which Connecticut will play a part, and once established that fund will provide the administrative function contemplated in the proposed bill. DEEP has been actively involved in the establishment of a regional fisheries mitigation fund via an 11- States Initiative on Offshore Wind Fisheries Mitigation. This collaboration between the Atlantic coastal states of Main through North Carolina has been ongoing since July 2021 and recently reached a significant milestone with selecting an entity (BrownGreer in Partnership with the Carbon Trust) to serve as the administrator of the regional fishery mitigation fund. DEEP believes the promulgation of regulations is unnecessary to ensure effective mitigation of fisheries and environmental impacts from Connecticut offshore wind projects and the establishment of a state-specific mitigation fund at best is duplicative with the ongoing work of the regional fund administer.

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NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Senator Heather Somers, 18th District.

Senator Somers Supports SB 63 because offshore wind power is an essential component of the global transition to renewable energy, but its development must be pursued responsibly. A mitigation fund designed to offset the impacts on commercial fishing and wildlife is a necessary tool to balance environmental progress with economic and ecological sustainability. By compensating for losses, supporting adaption, and promoting conservation, such a fund can ensure that the benefits of offshore wind power are realized without sacrificing the livelihoods of fishing communities or the health of marine ecosystems. She stated that in doing so, we can build a future where renewable energy, thriving fisheries, and vibrant wildlife coexist.

Charles Rothenberger, Director of Government Relations, Save the Sound

While Save the Sound supports the development of our offshore wind resources as a critical strategy to reduce air pollution, address climate change, improve the winter reliability of the ISO-NE electric grid, and successfully transition to a clean energy economy, they also recognize that these resources must be developed in an environmentally responsible manner. They believe that we must be cognizant of the potential for adverse impacts in accounting for unforeseen consequences or human error. They want an additional emphasis on the funding of actual mitigation and remediation measures, in addition to research and monitoring efforts, is an essential element of any mitigation fund.

Joseph Gilbert, Empire Fisheries

Mr. Gilbert is an owner/operator of Empire Fisheries, a commercial fishing business out of Stonington, CT and has been working on issues regarding offshore wind development for the past 15 years. It is important to emphasize that proper mitigation should always start with avoiding and minimizing harm, with compensation being the last resort. While he appreciates the intent of this bill, he believes it needs to be more specific in its approach, drawing from the recommendations made by the Connecticut Commission on Environmental Standards. Invest in fisheries to create new opportunities in fishing to replace lost fishing opportunities due to offshore wind development. Ensure that any re-training programs are designed to enhance fisheries, not pull people out of the fishing industry and to structure the mitigation fund to ensure it accumulates enough money to make a meaningful difference.

Connor Yakaitis, Deputy Director, CT League of Conservation Voters

CT League of Conservation Voters strongly supports offshore wind development, they recognize the importance of implementing proper mitigation measures to protect wildlife and the environment. Offshore wind developers have incorporated numerous strategies to minimize habitat disturbance and reduce potential impacts on marine ecosystems. One such strategy is the use of bubble curtains. This is technology that dampens noise pollution during construction, thereby minimizing disturbances to marine life, particularly whales and other sensitive species. They support continued research and implementation of best practices to further mitigate any potential ecological impacts.

54 Citizens of Connecticut sent in Testimony of Support for SB 63

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Nathan Frohling, Director of External Affairs, The Nature Conservancy

The Nature Conservancy has concerns regarding SB 63. As a conservation organization they believe it is important to make sure they are safe-guarding wildlife and ecosystems to the full extent reasonably possible within the necessity to develop renewable energy including offshore wind. They believe the environment, fishery communities and offshore wind developers will be best served if we address and resolve the issue of mitigation compensation in a standardized way. The concerns they have are with the state-focused approach that is not connected to a regional approach. Two suggestions would be for regional coordination and the need to make DEEP's Commission on Environmental Standards permanent.

Francis Pullaro, President, RENEW Northeast, Inc.

RENEW opposes SB 63 because they state that it will impede efforts by DEEP to participate in a multistate compensation fund by requiring DEEP to establish its own single-state program. It will add costs and risk to offshore wind projects serving Connecticut and may reduce compensation to Connecticut fisherman who fish in regional and federal waters. A standardized regional arrangement will benefit both offshore wind development and regional fisheries by providing an equitable and efficient system for addressing economic changes that fisherman may experience.

Moira Cyphers, Director, Atlantic Offshore & Eastern Region State Affairs, The American Clean Power Association

The American Clean Power opposes SB63 because its committing to a piecemeal approach of requiring projects to adhere to state specific standards outside of the agreed-upon, standardized regional compensatory fisheries compensation mitigation framework. They stated that if rolls back years of careful, open, and inclusive discussions and cooperation to ensure impacts to East Coast fisheries are first avoided, mitigated and when there are adverse consequences; fairly compensated by an independent body.

6 Connecticut Citizens sent in Testimony Opposing SB 63

Reported by: Judy Ganswindt

Date: February 25, 2025