

Joint Committee on Agriculture and Fisheries
Bill Summary

Bill Number: H.3981

Title: An Act relative to establishing a pilot program to support high impact fisheries

Sponsor: Representative Diggs of Barnstable

Cosponsors: None

Hearing Date: Wednesday, July 9, 2025 at 1:00 PM - 05:00 PM, A-1

Reporting Date: Sunday, September 7, 2025

Similar Matters: None

Prior History

New file; No prior history

Current Law

Chapter 21A of the Massachusetts General Laws establishes the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs and its internal structure. It establishes the power and duties of the office and its secretary, including ocean and river management, as well as the types of rules, regulations and laws it is responsible for enforcing.

Chapter 29 of the Massachusetts General Laws establishes the General Fund and many special funds.

Summary

This bill creates a pilot program within the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) which would work to reduce the impact of regulations on the economic success of “high-impact fisheries”. This term includes lobster and groundfish. EEA would collaborate with the Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) to identify industries which are most affected by regulatory changes in the past 5 years, quantify how much these industries were negatively affected as a result of these regulation changes, partner with private organizations, academic institutions and federal agencies to conduct research, and develop a system to compensate fishers who work in high-impact fisheries.

This bill also requires that any proposed regulation which would affect the fishing industry include an economic impact statement from DMF featuring projected losses in the industry from the proposed regulation, and a mitigation plan for the industry. These statements would be publicly posted on DMF’s website and would accept public comments for a 60-day period.

EEA would be required to report annually on findings from this pilot program and any identified issues or implemented mitigation strategies, any recommendations for changes to regulations, and any partnerships established or funding secured for purposes in this section. This report would be sent to the Chairs of the Joint Committee on the Environment and Natural Resources and the clerks of the House and Senate.

This bill creates the High- Impact Fisheries Mitigation Fund. This fund is administered by the Secretary of EEA. The fund would receive money from appropriations from the General Fund, interest from the fund, federal grants and other gifts or donations. Unused money in the fund will not revert to the General Fund unless this section is repealed and the Mitigation fund is dissolved.

This fund will be used to carry out the purposes of the pilot program established in this bill.

EEA will report on the fund annually to the Chairs of the Joint Committee on the Environment and Natural Resources, the House and Senate Committee on Ways and Means, and the clerks of the House and Senate.

Both the pilot program and the Mitigation fund will expire five years after they take effect. These sections are specified as taking effect January 1, 2025.