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SENATE PANEL APPROVES SMITH WIN-WIN MEASURE FOR COMMERCIAL FISHING AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Resolution Urges Use of Disposed Dredging Material to Create Artificial Reef Habitats

TRENTON – The Senate Environment and Energy Committee today approved a measure sponsored by Senator Bob Smith that offers a win-win solution for commercial fishing and the environment. The resolution, SR-46, urges the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council to establish new artificial reefs for commercial fishing and to consider using dredged materials from the Delaware River and New York-New Jersey Harbor for the construction of the new reefs.

“If designed and located properly, artificial reefs enhance the habitat and diversity of fishing resources,” said Sen. Smith, Chairman of the Energy and Environment Committee (D-Middlesex, Somerset). “Increasing the amount of environmental reefs along the Jersey coast would be a huge boon to both commercial and recreational fishing. With the ongoing dredging of the New York Harbor for the new trans-Hudson tunnel, we have an ideal opportunity to use these materials in a responsible manner that would eliminate the environmental burden and costs usually associated with the disposal of dredged materials.”

Artificial reefs are constructed by intentionally placing dense materials, such as old ships and barges, concrete and steel demolition debris and dredged rock on the sea floor within designated reef sites. The reefs are known to increase the production of fishery products, increase the energy efficiency of commercial and recreational fisheries, and contribute to tourism in New Jersey’s coastal economies and throughout the state.

In recent years, as artificial reefs have become more popular with commercial fishermen, commercial fish pots and lobster pots have begun to cover these reefs, which often snags the lines and gear of recreational anglers. Sen. Smith noted that increasing the number of artificial reefs in the state would benefit both commercial and recreational fishing because reefs could be set aside for both operations, eliminating these entanglements.

The resolution now heads to the full Senate for approval.