



OCEANS: Senate panel OKs dead zone, mapping bills *(Thursday, August 6, 2009)*

Sara Goodman, E&E reporter

The Senate Commerce Committee yesterday unanimously passed a bill that would increase federal research into ocean health by focusing on harmful algal blooms, which afflict oceans, coastal waters and lakes.

S. 952, sponsored by Sens. Olympia Snowe (R-Maine) and Bill Nelson (D-Fla.), would reauthorize and enhance federal research into harmful algal blooms and the extent of hypoxic "dead zones." The bill, which passed with no amendments, also would direct federal officials to create regional action plans that guide state and local governments in preparing for and mitigating the effects of algal blooms.

Algal blooms, or unusually high concentrations of algae, produce toxins that have been linked to fish kills and are viewed as a possible public health threat. Decomposing blooms also suck oxygen from the water, creating "dead zones" that imperil coastal marine life.

David Wilmot, president of Ocean Champions, said his group is now eyeing the House for the next legislative push. Rep. Brian Baird (D-Wash.), who chairs the Energy and Environment Subcommittee of the House Science Committee, this year called for more funding to address ocean acidification and harmful algal blooms.

Wilmot said he is "very optimistic" Baird's panel will be drafting a bill in the coming weeks.

"He has shown tremendous interest on this issue and a deep understanding of its importance, and he has indicated he wants to address it," Wilmot said. "We're hoping to see something introduced in early September."

Wilmot indicated the House version is expected to have bipartisan support as well.

Lawmakers also unanimously approved **S. 1078** with a managers amendment. The bill, introduced by Sens. Tim Johnson (D-S.D.) and George Voinovich (R-Ohio), would create a comprehensive

geospatial imagery mapping program at the U.S. Geological Survey that would integrate data from federal, state and local agencies for education, job training and applied research. The managers amendment from committee Chairman Jay Rockefeller (D-W.Va.) made minor technical changes to the original bill.

In the House, members of the Subcommittee on Energy and Minerals Resources are considering a similar bill, [H.R. 2489](#), which was sponsored by Rep. Stephanie Herseth Sandlin (D-S.D.).

Two climate bills pushed back until Sept.

The committee had initially scheduled votes on two bills to boost federal climate research, but action on the measures were postponed until next month when the committee expects to focus heavily on climate-related issues, according to a committee aide. "We thought it made sense to group those bills with other climate-related pieces of legislation," the aide said.

[S. 1539](#), from Rockefeller, would beef up the federal government's efforts to track greenhouse gases produced by natural sources and human activities, providing a scientific foundation for any U.S. effort to regulate emissions.

[S. 1538](#), also from Rockefeller, would authorize \$120 million over six years to create a new black carbon research and monitoring program at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Produced by diesel engines, burning trees and plants, and wood- and coal-powered stoves, black carbon is a short-lived but potent greenhouse warmer.

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