

119TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. _____

To establish an East Coast Bivalve Research Task Force.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

Mr. WHITEHOUSE (for himself and Mr. SCOTT of South Carolina) introduced
the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee
on _____

A BILL

To establish an East Coast Bivalve Research Task Force.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Quantifying Uncer-
5 tainty and Action to Help Optimize Growth of Shellfish
6 Act of 2025” or the “QUAHOGS Act of 2025”.

7 **SEC. 2. PURPOSES.**

8 The purposes of this Act are—

9 (1) to ensure that bivalve trends in East Coast
10 States regarding productivity and abundance are
11 characterized and that research needs are identified;

1 (2) to prioritize scientific research needs for
2 commercially harvested and aquacultured East Coast
3 bivalves;

4 (3) to address the increased variability or de-
5 cline in harvests of key bivalve species in East Coast
6 States, including quahogs (hard clams), by creating
7 a coordinated bivalve research strategy; and

8 (4) to support collaboration and coordination
9 for bivalve conservation efforts in East Coast States.

10 **SEC. 3. DEFINITIONS.**

11 In this Act:

12 (1) BIVALVE.—The term “bivalve” means
13 aquatic mollusks that have an external 2-part hinged
14 shell containing a soft-bodied invertebrate, including
15 clams, oysters, mussels, and scallops.

16 (2) INDIAN TRIBE.—The term “Indian Tribe”
17 has the meaning given the term in section 4 of the
18 Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance
19 Act (25 U.S.C. 5304).

20 (3) QUAHOG (HARD CLAM).—The term “quahog
21 (hard clam)” means the Northern quahog or hard
22 clam, *Mercenaria mercenaria*, as well as the South-
23 ern quahog or Southern hard clam, *Mercenaria*
24 *campechiensis*.

1 **SEC. 4. EAST COAST BIVALVE RESEARCH TASK FORCE.**

2 (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 90 days after the
3 date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Commerce,
4 in consultation with the Chairs of the New England, Mid-
5 Atlantic, and South Atlantic Fishery Management Coun-
6 cils and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission,
7 shall convene an East Coast Bivalve Research Task Force
8 (referred to in this section as the “Research Task Force”)
9 to—

10 (1) review existing bivalve research in East
11 Coast States;

12 (2) identify applied research needed to better
13 understand the increased variability and declining
14 harvests of quahogs (hard clams) and other bivalves
15 in some parts of the East Coast;

16 (3) support sustainable bivalve fisheries in East
17 Coast States;

18 (4) support sustainable bivalve aquaculture op-
19 erations; and

20 (5) evaluate economic impacts of bivalve wild
21 populations, fisheries, and aquaculture.

22 (b) COMPOSITION AND APPOINTMENT.—

23 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Research Task Force
24 shall be composed of not fewer than 16 and not
25 more than 21 members, who shall be appointed
26 under paragraph (2).

1 (2) APPOINTMENT BY SECRETARY.—The Sec-
2 retary of Commerce shall appoint members to the
3 Research Task Force as follows:

4 (A) One representative from each of the
5 following:

6 (i) The National Oceanic and Atmos-
7 pheric Administration who is knowledge-
8 able about bivalve research efforts in East
9 Coast States.

10 (ii) The Environmental Protection
11 Agency who is knowledgeable about United
12 States water quality assessments and
13 standards for bivalve and human health.

14 (iii) The United States Department of
15 Agriculture who is experienced in aqua-
16 culture research or management.

17 (iv) The New England Fishery Man-
18 agement Council.

19 (v) The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Manage-
20 ment Council.

21 (vi) The South Atlantic Fishery Man-
22 agement Council.

23 (vii) The Atlantic States Marine Fish-
24 eries Commission.

1 (B) One representative from a State fish
2 and wildlife management agency from each of—

3 (i) the region defined by the New
4 England Fishery Management Council;

5 (ii) the region defined by the Mid-At-
6 lantic Fishery Management Council; and

7 (iii) the region defined by the South
8 Atlantic Fishery Management Council.

9 (C) Not less than 1 and not more than 3
10 representatives of Indian Tribes with current or
11 historic, or both, knowledge of and reliance on
12 East Coast bivalves to be appointed with due
13 regard to differences in regional perspectives
14 and experience.

15 (D) Not less than 3 and not more than 6
16 representatives from the bivalve fishing industry
17 throughout the supply chain to be appointed
18 with due regard to differences in regional per-
19 spectives and experience, including from—

20 (i) directed commercial harvesting;

21 (ii) recreational harvesting;

22 (iii) fisheries of an Indian Tribe;

23 (iv) bivalve processors or distributors;

24 or

1 (v) bivalve aquaculture, including
2 hatcheries.

3 (E) 5 representatives who are academic ex-
4 perts in bivalve biology and ecology, bivalve
5 habitat restoration and conservation, bivalve
6 aquaculture, comprehensive marine research
7 planning in East Coast States, or the economics
8 or social dynamics of bivalve fisheries and aqua-
9 culture, including at least 1 representative with
10 expertise in quahogs (hard clams).

11 (3) CHAIR.—The National Oceanic and Atmos-
12 pheric Administration representative described in
13 paragraph (2)(A)(i) shall be the Chair of the Re-
14 search Task Force.

15 (c) DUTIES.—

16 (1) REVIEW.—The Research Task Force
17 shall—

18 (A) conduct a review of bivalve science rel-
19 evant to understanding current and potential
20 future harvests of quahogs (hard clams) and
21 other culturally or economically important bi-
22 valve species in East Coast States, as well as
23 solutions to identified problems, including an
24 examination of—

1 (i) traditional ecological knowledge of
2 bivalve populations and their ecosystems,
3 including potential for incorporation into
4 management plans;

5 (ii) habitat requirements for bivalve
6 populations, including water quality and
7 potential for water quality improvement or
8 alteration through habitat restoration or
9 other means, as well as potential future
10 habitat change;

11 (iii) impacts of erosion and sedimenta-
12 tion on bivalve populations and farms, in-
13 cluding potential mitigation techniques;

14 (iv) current and future impacts of cli-
15 mate change on bivalves, including ocean
16 warming, ocean acidification, and sea level
17 rise;

18 (v) conditions and techniques for suc-
19 cessful restoration, including feasibility of
20 multitrophic restoration, such as bivalves
21 and seagrass meadows;

22 (vi) mitigation strategies for climate
23 change impacts, including assisted migra-
24 tion;

1 (vii) culture and breeding techniques,
2 including genomic modifications to meet
3 different commercial, recreational, and res-
4 toration needs;

5 (viii) life cycle, including larval dis-
6 persal, recruitment dynamics, life-stage
7 specific mortality, and growth rate;

8 (ix) current and historic ranges, as
9 well as potential future range shifts due to
10 climate change;

11 (x) prevalence of diseases and disease
12 mitigating strategies;

13 (xi) management strategies for sus-
14 tainable bivalve aquaculture and potential
15 impacts; and

16 (xii) economic value and potential of
17 bivalve aquaculture, including financial and
18 regulatory barriers to entry for small-scale
19 operations;

20 (B) identify—

21 (i) scientific research gaps in under-
22 standing the ecology of culturally and eco-
23 nomically important bivalve species in East
24 Coast States; and

1 (ii) the needs for developing solutions
2 to declining harvests and other identified
3 problems, including with respect to qua-
4 hogs (hard clams);

5 (C) consider both current and future im-
6 pacts on the health and populations of bivalves
7 in East Coast States; and

8 (D) identify solutions to current and pre-
9 dicted impacts on the health and populations of
10 bivalves in East Coast States.

11 (2) REPORTS.—

12 (A) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 2 years
13 after the date the Research Task Force is es-
14 tablished, the Chair of the Research Task Force
15 shall submit to the Secretary of Commerce, the
16 Secretary of Agriculture, the Committee on
17 Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the
18 Senate, the Committee on Environment and
19 Public Works of the Senate, the Committee on
20 Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Sen-
21 ate, the Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
22 Science, and Related Agencies of the Committee
23 on Appropriations of the Senate, the Committee
24 on Natural Resources of the House of Rep-
25 resentatives, the Committee on Agriculture of

1 the House of Representatives, the Sub-
2 committee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and
3 Related Agencies of the Committee on Appro-
4 priations of the House of Representatives and
5 make publicly available, a report—

6 (i) describing the review conducted
7 under paragraph (1); and

8 (ii) that includes—

9 (I) recommendations on filling
10 knowledge gaps that warrant further
11 scientific inquiry; and

12 (II) findings from the reports of
13 work groups submitted under sub-
14 section (d)(2)(C).

15 (B) INTERIM PROGRESS REPORT.—Not
16 later than 1 year after the date the Research
17 Task Force is established, the Chair of the Re-
18 search Task Force shall submit to the individ-
19 uals and entities described in subparagraph (A)
20 and make publicly available an interim progress
21 report describing the review conducted under
22 paragraph (1).

23 (d) ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS.—

1 (1) VICE CHAIRPERSON.—The Research Task
2 Force shall select a Vice Chair by vote from among
3 the members of the Research Task Force.

4 (2) WORK GROUPS.—

5 (A) IN GENERAL.—The Research Task
6 Force—

7 (i) not later than 30 days after the
8 date of the establishment of the Research
9 Task Force, shall establish a work group
10 focused specifically on the research needs
11 associated with quahog (hard clams) popu-
12 lations in Rhode Island and across the
13 East Coast;

14 (ii) not later than 30 days after the
15 date of the establishment of the Research
16 Task Force, shall establish a work group
17 focused on the current and potential future
18 impacts of climate change on bivalve popu-
19 lations in East Coast States; and

20 (iii) may establish additional region-
21 ally or stock focused work groups within
22 the Research Task Force, as members de-
23 termine appropriate.

24 (B) COMPOSITION.—Each work group es-
25 tablished under this subsection shall—

1 (i) consist of not less than 5 individ-
2 uals who—

3 (I) are knowledgeable about the
4 species, issue, or region under consid-
5 eration; and

6 (II) shall include at least 1 mem-
7 ber of the Research Task Force,
8 though the others need not be; and

9 (ii) be balanced in terms of stake-
10 holder representation, including commer-
11 cial and aquaculture fisheries, as well as
12 experts in statistical, biological, economic,
13 social, or other scientific information as
14 relevant to the work group's focus.

15 (C) REPORTS.—Not later than 2 years
16 after the date the Research Task Force is es-
17 tablished, each work group established under
18 this subsection shall submit a report with the
19 work group's findings to the Research Task
20 Force.

21 (3) COMPENSATION.—Each member of the Re-
22 search Task Force and each member of a work
23 group shall serve without compensation.

24 (4) EXPENSES.—A member of the Research
25 Task Force and a member of a work group shall be

1 allowed travel expenses, including per diem in lieu of
2 subsistence, at rates authorized for an employee of
3 an agency under subchapter I of chapter 57 of title
4 5, United States Code, while away from the home or
5 regular place of business of the member in the per-
6 formance of the duties of the Research Task Force.

7 (5) ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT.—The Secretary
8 of Commerce shall provide such administrative sup-
9 port as is necessary for the Research Task Force
10 and its work groups to carry out their duties, which
11 may include support for virtual or in-person partici-
12 pation.

13 (e) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is
14 authorized to be appropriated to carry out this section
15 such sums as may be necessary.