

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6209

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Environmental Quality & Water Resources, January 21, 2000

Title: An act relating to environmental quality benchmarks.

Brief Description: Authorizing a proposal for an environmental quality benchmarks program.

Sponsors: Senators Fraser, Eide, Fairley and Kohl-Welles.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Environmental Quality & Water Resources: 1/13/2000, 1/21/2000
[DPS-WM].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY & WATER RESOURCES

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6209 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Fraser, Chair; Eide, Vice Chair; Jacobsen, McAuliffe, Morton and Swecker.

Staff: Richard Ramsey (786-7412)

Background: Over the past decade, the state has published numerous reports characterizing the condition of the state's environment. These include, the State of the Environment Report-- (1991) recommended by Environment 2010 Project and assembled by the Department of Ecology; Washington's Environmental Health-- (1995 and 1997) published by the Department of Ecology; and the Environmental Chartbook-- published biennially by the Office of Financial Management.

The Department of Ecology is authorized to develop an environmental profile of the state for use by the Department of Commerce, Trade, and Economic Development in attracting business to Washington.

The 1996 budget act required state agencies to begin performance-based budgeting, driven by agency goals, objectives and performance measures.

The 1996 Legislature created the Economic Climate Council to select a series of benchmarks to characterize the competitive environment in the state. A benchmark-- is any standard or reference by which performance can be measured or judged.

Performance standards and high quality, widely available information are essential tools for shifting from an environmental protection system characterized by command and control regulation, in which regulations prescribe acceptable pollution control technologies, to one based on performance, in which the means to control pollution are less important than the outcome.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The Washington State Institute for Public Policy is directed to prepare a report to the Legislature on establishing an environmental benchmark program.

The report reviews benchmark programs operating within Washington and in other states and provides options and recommendations on: (1) the public's role in adopting benchmarks, (2) administering and funding a benchmark program, (3) the potential subjects of benchmarks from environmental and natural resources, (4) a strategy for tracking trends of key benchmarks over time, and (5) benchmark parameters for which information is widely accessible.

The institute is to consult with legislators, local, state and federal environmental agency programs and interested stakeholder groups. The report is due to the environmental quality and fiscal committees of each house by December 15, 2000. The institute may accept nonstate funds to conduct the study.

The purposes of the Department of Ecology's environmental profile are expanded to generate information to benefit the public as well as industry. Ecology is directed to complete the profile in 2002 and provide periodic updates.

Funds in the worker and community right to know fund- may be expended on the benchmark report and the environmental profile update.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The substitute provides for the institute to accept nonstate funds to conduct the study, where the original bill did not. Technical changes were made.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 12, 2000.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: Benchmarks can reflect the values of the community and allow for better management.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Ron Shultz, National Audubon Society (pro); Bruce Wishart, People for Puget Sound (pro)