



## **OCEANS: House approves bill expanding algal-bloom** (03-12-2010)

**Allison Winter, E&E reporter**

A bill to expand research on outbreaks of deadly algae cleared the House today, after failing earlier this week to garner enough support for expedited passage.

Lawmakers voted 251-103 to approve the harmful algal blooms bill, [\*\*H.R. 3650\*\*](#).

The second try for the bill came after it earlier this week fell just short of the two-thirds majority it needed for expedited passage under suspension of the rules.

The bill passed without any amendment. The House Rules Committee had approved one amendment from Rep. Jeff Flake (R-Ariz.), which would have banned earmarks on any of the funds authorized in the legislation, but Flake withdrew the amendment.

A top priority of oceans advocates and marine scientists for years, the bill would reauthorize and expand federal programs to research the detection, prediction and elimination of harmful algal blooms.

"We need to protect our coast, oceans and citizens from the threats that these blooms cause on our beaches, in the food web, and in economic losses to communities and commercial fisheries," House Science and Technology Chairman Bart Gordon (D-Tenn.) said today.

The toxin-producing blooms arise when unusually high levels of algae concentrate. They are linked to fish kills and viewed as a potential threat to public health. Decomposing blooms suck oxygen from the water, creating "dead zones" that smother marine life. The events are often called "red tide" because of the reddish-brown tint that colors waters with a large algae presence.

The harmful blooms are increasing in frequency, severity and duration, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration chief Jane Lubchenco told the House Science Committee earlier this week. Lubchenco called the events "a very serious threat" to fisheries, tourism and the health of coastal communities.

An algal bloom or red tide event can shut down shellfish fisheries and close beaches. Harmful algal blooms and hypoxia cost the U.S. seafood and tourism industries approximately \$82 million per year, according to NOAA.

The bill would direct federal funding to research coastal dead zones. It would also establish for the first time a federal task force charged with creating regional action plans to prepare for and mitigate the effects of algal blooms, which are fed by nitrogen and phosphorus runoff from farms and cities.

The legislation authorizes \$41 million per year for 11 different research programs on algal blooms and hypoxia. That sum is more than twice as much the original authorization for the algae program: \$19 million a year.

The Senate Commerce Committee approved its version of the bill, [\*\*S. 952\*\*](#), last August.

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