

Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

CS/SB 1388 — Vessels

by Appropriations Committee on Agriculture, Environment, and General Government and
Senator Trumbull

The “Boater Freedom Act” provides that a law enforcement officer may not board any vessel or perform a vessel stop without probable cause that a violation of vessel safety laws has occurred or is occurring, regardless of whether the owner or operator of the vessel is on board. It prohibits a law enforcement officer from performing a vessel stop or boarding a vessel for the sole purpose of making a safety or marine sanitation equipment inspection and provides that a violation of safety and marine sanitation equipment requirements may only be considered a secondary offense.

The bill requires the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles to create a “Florida Freedom Boater” safety inspection decal. The decal will be issued following the demonstration of compliance with safety equipment carriage and use requirements.

The bill also contains the “Watercraft Energy Source Freedom Act,” which prohibits a state agency, municipality, government entity, or county from restricting the use or sale of a watercraft based on the energy source used to power the watercraft.

The bill authorizes FWC to modify the allowable means of anchoring, mooring, beaching, or grounding of vessels within springs protection zones. This is added to current law, which authorizes FWC to restrict vessel speed and operation and to prohibit vessel anchoring, mooring, beaching, or grounding within springs protection zones. The bill revises the threshold to establish these zones from preventing *harm* to preventing *significant harm* to certain springs, spring groups, and spring runs. The bill requires vessel operation, anchoring, mooring, beaching, or grounding to be the predominant cause of the significant harm.

The bill prohibits FWC from issuing a fishing license to any commercial fishing vessel owned by any alien power. Current law prohibits FWC from issuing a fishing license to any commercial fishing vessel owned by an alien power associated with communism.

If approved by the Governor, or allowed to become law without the Governor’s signature, these provisions take effect July 1, 2025.

Vote: Senate 35-2; House 104-7