

Connecticut Bans Fracking Waste Storage

STEPHEN SINGER, Associated Press.

HARTFORD, Conn. (AP) — A last-minute tussle over eel fishing in Connecticut interfered briefly with legislation that overwhelmingly passed the House of Representatives halting the storage and disposal of waste from gas exploration.

Lawmakers imposed a minimum three-year moratorium on importing waste from hydraulic fracturing, or fracking. The legislation requires the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to adopt regulations declaring waste and byproducts to be treated as hazardous waste.

The measure, which passed 128-19, also requires the industry to disclose the contents of waste and protect the environment from radioactive materials. It has passed the Senate and now heads to Gov. Dannel P. Malloy.

An environmental advocate accused a member of the House Republican minority of stalling passage of the legislation in exchange for a measure ending a ban on fishing eels in state waters.

Christopher Phelps, campaign director of Environment Connecticut, said Republican Rep. Craig Miner arranged a deal for successful passage of the eel legislation in exchange for halting his lengthy questioning.

"Connecticut House passes bill allowing fishery for threatened eel in return for ending filibuster on fracking waste bill? Seriously?" he tweeted.

Miner asked numerous questions as the House debated the measure. He sought clarifications on when wells may be drilled, trying to assure municipalities that geothermal, drinking water and other wells are not affected. A three-hour debate ensued.

Miner, who voted against the fracking moratorium, dismissed Phelps' criticism. He said his influence over legislation is limited.

"I don't have control of passage," he said.

Lawmakers initially considered an outright ban on drilling fluid and other waste in Connecticut. But that proposal drew criticism from some lawmakers who considered the move premature and possibly unfair because the state is expanding a network of natural gas pipes and equipment while leaving other states to clean up the waste.

Environmentalists intensely oppose fracking, saying it pollutes ground water and damages properties where gas is drilled.

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Phelps blasted what he called "horse-trading" that he said now jeopardizes eels, a protected species. Legislation that eliminates a ban and a \$250 fine on taking glass and elver eels in state waters passed the Senate Wednesday after winning approval in the House.

It requires the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to adopt regulations establishing and regulating glass eels by June 1, 2016.

Miner said the eels are valuable, fetching as much as \$2,400 a pound.

Rep. James Albis, the House Environment Committee's vice-chairman who steered the fracking measure, shrugged off talk of the eel connection.

"Stuff like this happens all the time," he said.

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