

Ed Note: March 2, 2015-Georgia House of Representatives: Speech by Rep. Jeff Jones, D167, in support of the SB101, the Marsh Buffer Bill. Just prior to his speech, Rep. Ron Stephens, R-SAV, had introduced and expressed support for passage of SB101, as amended.

Thank you Mr. Speaker. Good morning to my fellow House members.

I am here today to speak in favor of passage of SB101, the “Marsh Buffer” bill as it has become known, to include my strong support for the inclusion of amendment AM 40 0138 which I and others have worked very hard to have included as an integral part of SB101.

As we consider voting for passage of SB101 today I want to emphatically state that I believe it is vitally important that AM 40 0138 be included and passed as part of this bill.

What this amendment does is move the language regarding US Army Corp of Engineers permits under Section 404 of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act of 1972 to a different section of SB101. It is important for this body to understand the significance of this amendment.

As originally submitted, the location of the 404 language said that EPD, which of course is the Environmental Protection Division of the DNR, and the citizens of GA, must accept a categorical exemption to marsh buffer requirements for projects that have federal permits **REGARDLESS** of the size, scope, scale or impact of those projects on coastal saltwater marshes.

The amendment moves the 404 language in SB101 to lines 64 – 70 such that now, according to the amendment, EPD **MUST** review requests for buffer variances projects even if those projects have a federal permit.

This change made by the amendment is a huge and important change that greatly strengthens SB101.

There was another section of SB101 that I and others had serious concerns with on lines 45 and 46 of SB101 regarding an effective date and grandfathering clause. My concern was that SB101, as presented, exempted from the 25 foot buffer requirement, any time there is a shoreline stabilization project – such as a bulkhead, retaining wall, rip-rap or other forms of shore stabilization. In my mind and in the minds of others this was unacceptable because a bulkhead is not a buffer – it is a stabilization structure.

However, with the help and strong support of our House leadership, we have received a firm commitment from DNR that they will effectively deal with this concern in the rules making process that SB101 requires DNR complete by December 31, 2015.

So, with the addition of the amendment and with the strong commitment made by DNR, I am satisfied and fully support the passage of SB101.

I guess you could say I’m as happy as a “clutch” of newborn shrimp in a pristine marsh!

So, on behalf of the marine and other wildlife that call our beautiful coastal marshes home, and in particular our crabbers and shrimpers who make their living from our coastal waters and who are so important to the economy of Georgia, and the people everywhere who enjoy the beauty of our marshes, I ask for your full support of the passage of SB101 to include amendment AM 40 0138.

With that Mr. Speaker, I am happy to take any questions or to yield the well.

After Rep. Jones speech, a vote was called for SB101 in the House; the vote was unanimous for passage by the Georgia House of Representative. The Amended SB101 bill returned to the Senate where it passed with a vote of 46 for, 2 against, and 4 not voting.