

## **Buzzards Bay Oil Spill Commission Legislation Advances in House**

June 6, 2004

State Representative Bill Straus (D-Mattapoisett) announced today that the Committee on Natural Resources and Agriculture has given a favorable report to a bill drafted in response to last year's damaging Bouchard spill in Buzzards Bay.

The legislation is the result of a special commission, of which Bill Straus is a member, that was created last year to study the ecological and environmental impacts of the Bouchard oil spill. The bill is aimed to tighten the law to prevent future oil spills by increasing the fines and penalties for discharging oil and provides for increased watches on tugs and barges including increased requirements for drug and alcohol testing.

"I am pleased as a member of the special legislative commission, that the bill received important committee approval this week," said Rep. Straus. "In the absence of a federal requirement for double hulled vessels, our state must take aggressive steps to protect our waterways and sensitive shoreline," he added.

Some other highlights of the bill include language that directs the state's Secretary of Environmental Affairs to designate "areas of special interest" like Buzzards Bay, Mount Hope Bay and Vineyard Sound as having unique navigational challenges or environmental and economic concerns. The bill would require state pilots to board all vessels towing barges carrying oil or hazardous materials through these specifically identified waterways.

The bill also instructs the Commissioner of the state's Department of Environmental Protection to negotiate an agreement with the U.S. Coast Guard to implement a Vessel Traffic Service that monitors the speed, the course and destination of the vessels traveling through state waters.

In addition, a fund will be established to pay for any expenses the Commonwealth incurs while protecting the waterways from oil spills. The money will be used to support the development and training of safety committees and equipping the response teams that respond to oil spills and other environmental threats to the waterways.

"As the Bouchard oil spill demonstrated, these spills have a devastating effect on our communities. More than a year later, we are still cleaning up. This legislation will provide greater protection against such spills by regulating the vessels that carry the oil and the crews that pilot them," said Straus.

The bill is now being considered by the House Committee on Homeland Security and Federal Affairs. "I'm optimistic for prompt passage of this bill by the legislature. We need to be proactive in protecting our natural resources and environment from the terrible effects of oil spills," said Straus.

