

Statement released by the Georgia Water Coalition

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, March 12, 2015— On Thursday, SB 101 passed out of the House Natural Resources and Environment Committee. The Georgia Water Coalition urges coastal legislators to fix the loopholes in SB101 to protect the salt marsh for future generations.

All of the coastal Riverkeepers—Savannah Riverkeeper, Ogeechee Riverkeeper, Altamaha Riverkeeper and Satilla Riverkeeper—as well as the Coastal Conservation Association, the Glynn County Environmental Coalition and One Hundred Miles continue to advocate for specific amendments to Senate Bill 101 (SB101) that will close significant loopholes in the bill.

These loopholes leave nearly 400,000 acres of our most precious coastal resource unprotected from the ill-effects of sedimentation. Earlier in the 2015 General Assembly, members of the Georgia Senate filed [SB 101](#) to fix the problem. SB 101 establishes a 25-foot buffer in the Erosion and Sedimentation Control Act to protect coastal marshlands from sediment pollution. Unfortunately, SB101 still includes two broad exemptions to the salt marsh buffer provision.

“The quality of Georgia’s salt marsh is an essential component of the quality of life of coastal residents,” said Megan Desrosiers, Executive Director of One Hundred Miles. “The coast is a natural resource for the entire state of Georgia.”

The Georgia Water Coalition specifically requests closure of two loopholes.

SB101 includes an exemption from the 25-foot buffer provision for all “currently serviceable shoreline stabilization structures.” If passed, this exemption will enable development projects to be built directly adjacent to any shoreline stabilization structure without a buffer variance. This presents a dangerous scenario for property owners and for the environment. This loophole can be closed by requiring new shoreline stabilization projects to comply with the buffer requirement.

SB101 instructs the Board of the Department of Natural Resources to promulgate rules that would provide a categorical exemption or a “variance by rule” for all projects that receive an Army Corps of Engineers permit under section 404 of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act of 1972 or Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899. These federally permitted projects run the gamut from very small docks to very large industrial operations. With such a wide range of project impacts, a categorical exemption is not appropriate. SB101 must be amended so that these types of projects become a consideration for a buffer variance rather than an automatic exemption.

“We must close the loopholes in SB 101 to protect the coastal economy and environment,” said Gil Rogers, Senior Attorney of Southern Environmental Law

Center. “The coast’s legacy is on the line.”

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The [Georgia Water Coalition](#) is a consortium of more than 220 conservation and environmental organizations, hunting and fishing groups, businesses, and faith-based organizations that have been working to protect Georgia’s water since 2002. Collectively, these organizations represent more than 250,000 Georgians.