

## Sea Level Bill Would Allow North Carolina to Stick Its Head in the Sand

**A bill moving through the state legislature would allow developers to ignore sea level predictions based on global warming**

By SETH CLINE

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Wading into the turbulent debate over global warming, North Carolina's state legislature is considering a bill that would require the government to ignore new reports of rising sea levels and predictions of ocean and climate scientists.

Business interests along the state's coastline pushed lawmakers to include language in a law that would require future sea level estimates to be based only on data from past years. New evidence, especially on sea level rise that could be tied to global warming, would not be factored into the state's development plans for the coast.

[Poll: Republicans Coming Around on Global Warming]

"We're skeptical of the rising sea level science," says Tom Thompson, chairman of NC-20, an economic development group representing the state's 20 coastal counties. "Our concern is that the economy could be tremendously impacted by a hypothetical number with nothing but computers and speculation."

That 'hypothetical number' came from the state's Coastal Resources Commission, which recommended planning around a 39-inch rise in sea level by 2100. At the behest of NC-20 and coastal governments, the commission decided to remove the number from its policy entirely.

"Originally we did have the 39-inch recommendation, but the commission chose to remove that," says Michele Walker, spokeswoman for the North Carolina Coastal Resources Commission. "We got a lot of pushback from coastal governments and groups who were concerned that would hurt their ability to develop in their communities."

The bill is still in its early stages, but the section stirring up controversy states:

*"These rates shall only be determined using historical data, and these data shall be limited to the time period following the year 1900. Rates of seas-level rise may be extrapolated linearly..."*

The parts about using only historical data, which shows a slow, linear sea-level rise—not the faster increases associated with global warming—have drawn the most ire from scientists.

"Clearly they don't understand science at all – (sea level rise) hasn't been linear," says Stan Riggs, a professor at East Carolina University who is an expert on the state's coastline. "To put blinders on and just say we don't accept what's happening on our coast is absolutely criminal."

"But the people that live out there that aren't developers are all on board. It's the managers and developers who want to keep the status quo. They're making a lot of money off of it," Riggs added.



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1. What would be the result of considering only past data versus considering future estimates in the development of coastal properties?
2. What is NC-20?
3. What amount of sea level rise does the Coastal Resources Commission recommend planning on?
4. Why would NC-20 want to refute that amount of sea level rise?
5. Explain the opinion of Stan Riggs.
6. How do you think the issue should be resolved?