Crawfish protection bills approved

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — Two bills to protect the crawfish and catfish farmers from regulation by the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries were approved Monday by the House.

Although the bills did the same thing, the authors wanted their own measures passed in this election year.

Crawfish farmers have been burning since the Wildlife and Fisheries Department called for the wearing of life jackets while farmers were on their one-foot-deep ponds.

Also, the crawfish farmers had to pay fees of up to $50 or more to harvest the crawfish.

The catfish farmers wanted in on the bill although they had not been targeted for regulatory action.

Bills placing the fish farmers under the Department of Agriculture, thus protecting them from Wildlife and Fisheries, were sponsored by Reps. Harry Benoit, D-Breaux Bridge, and Danny Lemoine, D-Ville Platte.

A similar bill by Rep. Dale Sittig, D-Eunice, already has passed the House.

"This is the same, exact bill," said Rep. Manny Fernandez, D-Chalmette, when Benoit's measure — the last one — came up.

"Yes," said Benoit. "Why do we need this one?" asked Fernandez.

"This is my bill," said Benoit, whose district is a stronghold of crawfish fishermen. "That's why."