

The Undersea Cable Protection Act

The Undersea Cable Protection Act respects the national security importance of submarine cables while balancing the important need to protect national marine sanctuaries. The Undersea Cable Protection Act preserves existing local, state, and federal permitting rules while exempting subsea cables from National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)'s special use permit process.

Regulates Efficiency and Permits Reform:

Undersea cables are currently required to get a Special Use Permit (SUP) for all subsea cables in national marine sanctuaries. This process is duplicative of existing local, state and federal permitting laws. Obtaining SUPs causes unnecessary delays and is detrimental to meeting our connectivity needs in a timely manner. In August, NOAA temporarily suspended, for two years, requirements for SUPs for the continued presence of submarine cables in new national marine sanctuaries. This legislation goes further and eliminates the SUP process while maintaining existing local, state and federal permit rules. NOAA made its decision based on the minimal environmental impact they found subsea cables caused in marine sanctuaries. If enacted, this bill better protects submarine cables from our adversaries and allow for easier maintenance when cables are inadvertently damaged.

Enhances Global Connectivity:

Undersea networks are a major component of our global connectivity. They facilitate 99% of international data and communications, and are pivotal in the functioning of governments, economies, and societies worldwide. The exponential growth of the digital economy has made these cables a more critical piece of infrastructure. Enhancing the security of these cables and promoting rather than deterring their deployment and maintenance will protect our national and economic security and ensure we are connected to the rest of the world.

Safeguards National Security Through Infrastructure Resilience:

Grouping substantial amounts of undersea cables in close proximity creates an easier and higher value target for nations looking to deal a critical blow to our ability to connect to the rest of the world posing a significant national security and economic risk. Potential risks and disruptions can be mitigated by spreading out fiber optic cables to make any disruptions to the network less severe.

Supporters of the Undersea Cables Protection Act:

- International Connectivity Coalition (ICC)
- INCOMPAS
- Telecommunications Industry Association
- U.S. Chamber of Commerce.