

REPEAL OR REFORM THE FOREIGN DREDGE ACT

Preston Brashers, Research Fellow



TOPLINE: Laws requiring that dredging vessels operating in the U.S. be built in America and owned and crewed primarily by Americans should be changed to allow dredging by vessels from other friendly nations.

BACKGROUND: Efficient and well-functioning ports and channels ensure that goods can be transported to American consumers and that American products can be shipped to foreign markets without unnecessary expense. And dredging—the process of removing sediment from the bottom of rivers, harbors, and other bodies of water—is a critical part of the maintenance and improvement of maritime infrastructure.

The Foreign Dredge Act effectively [prohibits](#) dredging by vessels that aren't U.S.-built and U.S.-owned. Dredging vessels are generally required to have U.S. citizen officers and mostly American crews. These requirements severely limit dredging competition, notably excluding [Dutch](#) and [Belgian](#) firms. Dutch and Belgian companies have large fleets that include hopper dredgers with hoppers (containers that hold sediment before it is discarded or relocated) that have up to four times the capacity of the largest U.S. hopper dredge. These vessels can also dredge up to [four](#) times [deeper](#) than any U.S. vessel.

Action Items (Congress):

- **Amend the dredging statutes** ([46 U.S.C. § 55109](#)) so that they either:
 - Only **prevent dredging by vessels with ties to** foreign entities of concern such as **China**, or
 - **Allow dredging by ships from countries that are formal U.S. allies.**
- **Amend** [46 U.S.C. § 55110](#) so that **transporting dredged material doesn't trigger requirements that vessels have U.S. crews.**

How It Would Make Life More Affordable:

- Wider and deeper ports and shipping lanes allow more shipping traffic from larger vessels with fewer delays and bottlenecks, reducing transportation costs.
- According to [NOAA](#): "With one more inch of depth in a port, a cargo ship could carry about 50 more tractors, 5,000 televisions, 30,000 laptops, or 770,000 bushels of wheat."
- Dredging facilitates more vigorous domestic and international competition.
- Taxpayers could [save](#) hundreds of millions of dollars per year if the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers held internationally competitive bids for dredging contracts.

Related Legislation: Port Modernization and Supply Chain Protection Act ([S. 4753](#)).

BOTTOMLINE: The Foreign Dredge Act stifles infrastructure, makes the U.S. less competitive in international commerce, and drives up costs for consumers.