

**TESTIMONY OF
Deirdre Gilbert
Director, State Marine Policy**

**The Department of Marine Resources (DMR) is testifying
in Opposition to**

**LD 178, Resolve, Directing the Department of Marine Resources to Conduct an Impact Study
in the St. George River Estuary**

**Before the Committee on Marine Resources
Sponsored by Representative Kruger
Date of Hearing: February 25, 2015**

Senator Baker, Representative Kumiega, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources, my name is Deirdre Gilbert, Director of State Marine Policy for the Department of Marine Resources, and I am testifying on behalf of the Department in opposition to LD 178.

The Department believes this is an issue that merits exploration, but as a general rule is opposed to taking a localized approach to an issue that potentially affects municipalities statewide. A study in the St. George may produce findings and recommendations that would benefit this particular estuary, but these outcomes may not be as successful in other areas due to differing environmental, economic and social conditions.

Harvest areas for both the marine worm and soft shelled clam fisheries have geographic differences including sediment type, season of harvest, and method of harvest. Perhaps more importantly, community response to conflict between these two fisheries has varied across the state. In some areas of the coast, worm and clam harvests proceed concurrently without incident, while in others; Marine Patrol and local law enforcement are brought in to address property damage and physical threats. The Department believes there is value in understanding why this conflict arises in some areas while not in others, and it will not be possible to gain this broader picture if a study is completed in only one area.

The resolve directs the Department to investigate the effects marine worm harvesting has on soft shelled clams, particularly seed beds, but not the potential for impact of clam harvesting on marine worm populations. The resolve also does not address the effects on the marine worm or soft shelled clam populations of the intensity of harvest activities and resulting changes in sediment composition and character.

Finally, the Department notes that this resolve requests the Department to collaborate with the Georges River Shellfish Management Committee and the five member towns, but does not specify direct engagement with the marine worm industry. As recently as 1998, this same issue

was addressed in the St. George specifically and was ultimately unsuccessful because the Conflict Resolution Workgroup "failed to represent the worm industry". We would recommend that inclusion of the worm industry be specified in the interest of identifying a set of best management practices that will be agreed upon by harvesters in both fisheries.

Thank you for your consideration, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.