

Thoughts on LD 563: An Act Regarding the Purchase of Trap Tags in the Lobster Fishery, by a Latent License Holder.

My name is Brandon Doucette of Kittery, I've began lobster fishing when I was around 10 years old with my father. He's been fishing for nearly 40 years, all 3 of his sons fish, and we're what I would call a traditional fishing family. This bill will impact my youngest brother and me, both of us have latent licenses yet we fish every year just not on our own boats so we don't have landings. I am against this bill and I will bring up 3 topics that should be considered – Conservation, a Financial Aspect, and Fairness and Equality. It would be nice if the purpose and spirit of the proposed bill was included in the document. To me, latent licenses should be a non-issue.

Conservation

A latent license is the purest form of conservation. That license is 800 potential traps in the water that are on shore. The sole purpose of the limited entry system is conservation - to remove traps from the water. Freeing up tags from latent license holders to push the wait list along creates more license holders and puts more traps in the water. Making a license holder cut back from 800 to 300 tags to free up 500 to be applied to the retired tags for that year would be counterproductive. Doing so bypasses the purpose of the limited entry system. It frees up tags in the short term to give new licenses out, yet each license holder that lost those 500 tags as well as the new license holders, have the ability to increase back up to the max of 800. This is not a solution to the wait list that would be good for the lobster stock; all it will do is increase the number of tags and license holders. The problem here is the way the rule for the exit ratios is written. The exit ratios should only be dependant upon retired licenses and not tags, like it is in zones A and B. All licenses have the potential to carry 800 tags. For example if 8 people do not report landings and are cut from 800 tags to 300 in a zone that has a 5 to 1 exit ratio, this creates a new license off the waiting list for the next calendar year. Now we would have 9 license holders with 300 tags, in 5 years they all could have built back up to have 800 tags. This will become an enormous problem when our aging fishermen retire and the exit ratios are reduced to say 3 to 1 or 2 to 1.

Financial Aspect

Lobstering isn't a cheap endeavor; neither is purchasing your license and max number of tags every year so you don't lose them. Latent license holders have invested a lot of money to retain their tags from year to year. The price of tags generates revenue for the state, each strip of plastic can't cost more than pennies to manufacture yet they cost fishermen 50 cents a piece. That would cost the state \$400 per year in revenue for each latent license that holds 800 tags currently. It would be very difficult to sustain a successful business with only 300 tags, let alone start a lobster business with all the initial

overhead with that few traps. I view my license as a backup plan, if I ever leave my current job this is something I invested a tremendous amount of time, money and effort to obtain. I would like to hope that this job opportunity that I have created for myself does not go away or become a line of work that I can't depend on because I am handcuffed to a small amount of tags. Consider a license holder such as my youngest brother; he's nearly 22 years old with little money and even less credit. How does someone that grew up in a fishing family graduate high school then buy a boat with all the traps and equipment to go fishing? They don't, they hold onto their license and in doing so it becomes latent, yet he fishes with others to continue to learn the trade and to save up money. He has been fishing every year for the past dozen or so years, but he probably doesn't have the required landings. If this bill passes, it will be extremely discouraging for people like him that are trying to do everything right to get fishing on their own. The same applies to the grown adult that comes off the wait-list, how many people have enough money to buy a boat and a string of traps just sitting in their savings account?

Fairness and Equality

This is my biggest gripe with this bill. I went through the apprenticeship program just like everyone else that obtained their license in this manner; I earned my license and the 800 tags that are attached to it. There is no reason why my license should be less valuable or my time invested in the apprentice program have less importance than someone on the wait list. I understand it would be frustrating to be on the wait list for years, so are all the other closed fisheries in the state. My father had an elver license that he forgot to renew, now it's gone permanently; I'm sure he'd love to be able to catch those things now. There's a reason some fisheries are closed, and there's a reason why we have limited-entry and the wait-list in the lobster industry. If this is the way the state wants to move regarding latent licenses at least make it contingent upon years that haven't already gone by. Give people a chance to get the landings, don't just spring it on people that had no idea it was dependant on previous years. Everyone with latent licenses buy tags under the impression that if they buy them they wouldn't be taken away.