

Comments LD 493

Chairpersons Baker, Kumeiga and members of the Committee:

I'm here today wearing two hats, one the slime encrusted hat of lobsterman and the other, perhaps we'll call the thinking cap of a member of the Ocean Acidification Commission member. You good people have been briefed on the Commission's report so I'll just touch on a few points relating to fishing before addressing LD 493. Fishermen working the Gulf of Maine have historically been, with a few exceptions, a rather staid bunch, content to go about their business as usual, accused at times of having a "head in the sand" approach to issues around them. But the last few years has had them witnessing a succession of rapid and profound changes in their working environment. These have included the ocean warming events of 2012, the disappearance from our waters of cod and shrimp, the invasive species along with the anomalous species, and the shell disease along with the dead mud in the clam flats. All of which, the people in this room have most likely heard or read about previously. So I will just add however, that all these things were just as real and life altering to them, as this winters extreme weather conditions were to the rest of the population, with perhaps even more of an economic pinch. This has all lead to what you might call an attitude adjustment among the fishing community. According to a recent survey and report by the Center for American Progress, sixty-five percent of this mostly conservative group believe that climate change is happening now and will negatively effect their ability to profit from their businesses. A full twenty-nine percent think ocean acidification is effecting them as well. And when I state that with the sense that it is a large number, you should remember that OA is not like back-to-back-to back major snow storms, but most often more obscure, hidden from our direct observations, only revealing itself to our monitoring instruments or as indirect causation of some sort. There has also been limited chances for the needed outreach and education efforts to inform people about it. In spite of this, we now know there is growing concern amongst lobstermen and that their questions relating to OA remain unanswered. Questions as to the effects on lobsters themselves, their growth stages, the food web as well as the totality of their ecosystem. So now we have the OA Report and although it does not contain all the answers itself, it does prescribe a direction to go when we endeavor to find them. What we need now is a coordinated effort to begin to carry out this task and LD 493 seeks to give us the coordinating body to do just that. Hopefully it might have some of the same people as the OA Commission to preserve a continuity of the knowledge and creative energies that went into the original report, plus the addition of some new members that might add some fresh insights. I can tell you that as a member of this panel it became evident from the moment we were planning to release the report there was a need for an organizational entity. Who was going to answer inquiries, talk to the press, establish relations with other states considering OA measures, and from these simplistic confusions at the beginning, things will likely evolve as the work and considerations become more complex. OA is an important issue of our day, the Maine Legislature has already recognized that, let's make sure we're continuing down a direct and effective path to combat it. Thank you.

Richard C. Nelson
Friendship, Maine
fvpescadero@yahoo.com