



# MAINE

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## Lobstermen's Association, Inc.

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**Testimony of David Cousens  
President of the Maine Lobstermen's Association**

**In Opposition to  
LD 800 An Act To Prevent Passage of Alewives through the  
Grand Falls Dam on the St. Croix River**

**Before the Committee on Marine Resources  
April 27, 2015**

Senator Baker, Representative Kumiega, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources, my name is David Cousens. I am the President of the Maine Lobstermen's Association (MLA). MLA is Maine's oldest and largest fishing industry organization whose mission is to advocate for a sustainable lobster resource and the fishermen and communities that depend on it.

The MLA strongly opposes LD 800. This issue has been a source of great controversy since the blockage of the St. Croix in the mid-1990's, but it has always been straightforward for MLA. On the question of whether or not to allow for unconstrained passage of alewives on the St. Croix River, the MLA sides with Mother Nature. We were here just two years ago in support of opening the St. Croix because we believe that the river should remain as Mother Nature intended; where the region's native species like alewives are able to fully utilize the ecosystem.

Maine's lobster industry is the state's most valuable fishery. In 2014, Maine lobstermen hauled in nearly 124 million pounds of lobster valued at nearly \$457 million, generating more than a billion dollars in economic activity for the state. It is not an understatement to say that Maine's lobster industry is the economic backbone of our coastal communities.

But lobstermen cannot fish without bait. And our bait must come from sustainable fisheries; the more local the fishery, the better. This has become more difficult in recent years as regulations have impacted availability of our two main bait sources -- herring and menhaden. Beginning in 2007, federal regulations have resulted in inshore herring quotas being cut in half. In 2012, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission reduced menhaden landings by 25%. Both fisheries are again under review by managers. While it is hoped that menhaden landings could increase due to a favorable stock assessment, herring landings could again be reduced.

Managers are considering reductions in herring landings not because the resource is overfished, but because like alewives, they are an essential forage fish for many other species and serve as a fundamental building block of a healthy marine ecosystem.

Out of necessity, Maine lobstermen have diversified their bait supply beyond our local staples of herring and menhaden. Our industry is now relying more and more on baits imported from distant, international and fresh water sources. Importing bait does not support Maine jobs and these non-native baits can carry disease and threaten the health of our marine environment. Fortunately, the Maine Department of Marine Resources has put regulations in place to control these risky bait sources.

Yet we have a tremendous under-developed and therefore underutilized local bait source right here in Maine. The alewife run on the St. Croix River has historically provided a rich source of alewives for our fishermen. But in recent history it has provided hardly any because the river has been blocked. This was bad policy that hurt Maine lobstermen, weakened our coastal economy and threatened our environment. Fortunately, after nearly 20 years of discussion and debate, the Legislature changed the law to allow alewife passage to resume on the St. Croix in 2012.

The MLA strongly supports the state of Maine's efforts to manage and restore alewives in many of the state's rivers; and the St. Croix should be the most productive of these. With its opening just a few short years ago, this river must remain unblocked so its native alewife population can rebuild into one of the state's most productive alewife runs. Keeping the river open will support Maine's valuable lobster industry by providing an excellent local and sustainable source of bait and restoring the natural balance of this ecosystem.

The MLA urges you to show leadership and maintain unconstrained alewife passage on the St. Croix River. Your vote against LD 800 will be another important step for Maine to do the right thing for St. Croix alewives, the Gulf of Maine ecosystem and our coastal economy.

Thank you.