



May 1, 2017

Committee on Marine Resources
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0100

Senator Maker, Representative Kumiega, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources,

The Island Institute supports LD 1438. In particular, we support provisions that improve the state's ability to market Maine grown aquaculture products, double the length of a standard lease period, and allow for a training program requirement in applying for a license.

The Island Institute is a 32-year-old community development organization that works to sustain Maine's island and remote coastal communities, and exchanges ideas and experiences to further the sustainability of communities here and elsewhere.

Currently, many of the communities we work with have a high economic reliance on the lobster fishery. While we are proud of our fishermen and regulatory agencies for managing this fishery to its current level of success, we also are aware that it is vulnerable to market and environmental changes, and that we have seen signs of both in the last ten years. Because of our abundant coastline, pristine waters, and tradition of both farming and fishing, we see aquaculture in Maine as a crucial opportunity to diversify our working waterfronts.

Our organization has been working for the last five years to support the growth of the aquaculture industry in Maine. We have done this through a three-pronged approach, including conducting scientific research, engaging primary students with aquaculture, and providing business training and education to adults that are interested in starting aquaculture businesses.

This last strategy has led to the formation of our Aquaculture Business Development program, a business-training program through which we help entrepreneurs, primarily fishermen, to start oyster, mussel, or sea vegetable farms. In this program, we combine classroom discussions with field-trips and individual business and financial education support to help the group navigate some of the trickier aspects of starting an aquaculture business, including applying for a lease, creating effective and positive community relationships, and matchmaking with buyers and distributors. In the first round of this program, we helped 11 entrepreneurs to start new farms, and have recently kicked off the second round with another 23 motivated and responsible individuals living in areas from Eastport to Portland.

As we conduct this work, we have been consistently impressed by the efforts of the Department of Marine Resources. They have had a difficult job with aquaculture, encouraging the rapid growth of the industry while managing the concerns and occasional conflict that comes with a shared resource. Despite this, they have been an effective force, working tirelessly to encourage the viability of new businesses, while at the same time easing the concerns of fishermen and coastal landowners about the industry.

We believe that LD 1438 will help the DMR and the state of Maine in its goal of promoting the sustainable growth of aquaculture, and as such, we are in support.

The DMR should have the same ability to promote and assist in the marketing of Maine grown aquaculture products in the same way that they already promote other forms of Maine seafood. Removing this prohibition will allow the Department to provide basic assistance for marketing and promoting this growing industry.

By doubling the term of a standard lease from 10 to 20 years, the legislation would cut down on the amount of administrative time that the DMR would have to spend on each farm, while retaining their authority to monitor the activities of a lease-holder and revoke their privilege at any time. It would also allow for farmers to make longer-term plans, and ease risk in the eyes of financing institutions.

Last, by granting the Commissioner the authority to require training prior to the receipt of an aquaculture license, the legislation will help to ensure that the founders of sea farms will be responsible neighbors to fishermen, boaters, and fellow aquaculturalists out on the water, as well as good representatives of Maine aquaculture as a whole. As an organization already conducting training for new aquaculturalists, the Island Institute has seen firsthand how important education can be, especially in guiding the transition from fishermen to farmer of the sea. In areas such as community relations and biosecurity, we stress that these trainings would be important not just for the success of new growers, but also the more established aquaculturalists already growing beside them. If this law was put into place, we would look forward to working with the DMR along with partner organizations to ensure that a required educational component would be productive and accessible for all.

In closing, we believe that LD 1438 will be a boon to the sustainable growth of aquaculture in Maine, helping to keep our economy strong and our working waterfronts vibrant. Thank you for your time, and if you have questions, please feel free to contact us.

Sincerely,



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Marine Programs Director
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