

STATE OF MAINE

—
IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD
TWO THOUSAND TWENTY-SIX

—
S.P. 903 - L.D. 2216

An Act to Establish the Maine Blue Economy Center

Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:

Sec. 1. 5 MRSA §15303, sub-§7, ¶D, as enacted by PL 2017, c. 109, §4, is amended to read:

D. A program, in collaboration with the Maine Innovation Economy Advisory Board under Title 10, section 949, to support the technology transfer activities of the University of Maine System, other postsecondary educational institutions in the State and nonprofit research institutes eligible for funding under an asset technology fund established and administered by the institute, to increase the level of patenting at the University of Maine System, other postsecondary institutions in the State and nonprofit research institutes and to promote the licensing of the patents, especially to new and existing companies with operations in the State. Support under this paragraph may include expenses associated with patenting and licensing. The administrative costs of a program under this paragraph are not management and related operating costs of the institute under section 15305; ~~and~~

Sec. 2. 5 MRSA §15303, sub-§7, ¶E, as enacted by PL 2017, c. 109, §4, is amended to read:

E. A program in collaboration with the University of Maine School of Law to support the commercialization and manufacturing of innovations in the State by providing education and assistance with the patent process of the United States Patent and Trademark Office to companies, inventors and entrepreneurs in the State. The administrative costs of a program under this paragraph are not management and related operating costs of the institute under section 15305; and

Sec. 3. 5 MRSA §15303, sub-§7, ¶F is enacted to read:

F. The Maine Blue Economy Center pursuant to section 15331, subsection 2.

Sec. 4. 5 MRSA c. 407, sub-c. 5 is enacted to read:

SUBCHAPTER 5

MAINE BLUE ECONOMY CENTER

§15341. Maine Blue Economy Center

1. Definitions. As used in this subchapter, unless the context otherwise indicates, the following terms have the following meanings.

A. "Blue economy" means the aggregate of persons engaged in any economic activity that depends upon the sustainable use of ocean, coastal or marine resources that optimizes innovation to retain and expand economic opportunities in the State while maintaining or improving the long-term health of marine ecosystems, including, but not limited to, business, manufacturing, research and education relating to commercial fishing, sustainable aquaculture and marine vegetation cultivation, marine biotechnology, ocean data and marine research, marine and coastal environmental science, resilient coastal infrastructure, working waterfront access and infrastructure, coastal ecosystem restoration and stewardship, marine recreation and tourism and sustainable boat building or marine propulsion or other industries grounded in the State's marine heritage, research expertise, location or traditional activities.

B. "Board" means the board of directors for the center established in subsection 3.

C. "Center" means the Maine Blue Economy Center established in subsection 2.

D. "Commercial fishing" means the harvesting or processing, or both, of wild marine organisms from natural habitats with the intent of disposing of them for profit or trade in commercial channels.

2. Establishment; purpose. The Maine Blue Economy Center is established within the Maine Technology Institute to serve as the State's central coordinating entity for blue economy sector initiatives and to work in collaboration with governmental entities, trade associations, institutions of higher education, research institutions, nonprofit organizations, businesses and other entities to provide for the growth of the blue economy sector. The center shall support the sustainable development of ocean-based industries while recognizing the importance of the Gulf of Maine ecosystem and the marine resources upon which coastal communities and traditional marine industries depend. The center is established to serve the following purposes:

A. To expand the State's blue economy by supporting collaborative research, workforce training, entrepreneurial ventures, private sector investment and commercialization of ocean-based innovations;

B. To gather and analyze data that inform decisions, measure progress, identify new opportunities for the blue economy and monitor the health of ocean resources on which the blue economy depends, including through the development of a blue economy database and accessible public tools, such as an online portal and other public resources that improve understanding of the State's blue economy;

C. To communicate ongoing and emerging trends and performance metrics for economic activity and the health of ocean resources on which the blue economy depends through a regular public report on the state of the State's blue economy;

D. To serve as a statewide navigator and coordinating organization for the State's blue economy by connecting partners, aligning initiatives, strengthening communication and reducing unnecessary duplication across public, private and nonprofit efforts;

E. To coordinate with public and private partners, educational and research institutions, nonprofit organizations and business stakeholders to strengthen the State's blue economy and support collaboration across ocean industries;

F. To ensure that the traditional marine industries of this State, including commercial fishing and working waterfront activities, remain central to the State's blue economy and are fully considered in the center's planning, partnerships and recommendations;

G. To facilitate the creation of a highly skilled workforce and support attraction and retention of workers in the blue economy sector, including by promoting internships, apprenticeships and other work-based learning opportunities;

H. To conduct targeted workforce analyses, including assessments of workforce barriers, participation, outcomes and future workforce needs in the blue economy sector;

I. To support efforts to strengthen awareness about blue economy careers and education pathways in kindergarten to grade 12 and higher education;

J. To investigate opportunities for grants, loans and other resources to support blue economy entities and initiatives;

K. To develop strategies to attract federal, philanthropic and private investment and to position this State competitively for external funding;

L. To identify policy, programmatic and partnership opportunities that can support sustainable growth across the blue economy sector;

M. To advise the president of the Maine Technology Institute designated under section 15302 on matters related to the blue economy; and

N. To report regularly to the Legislature regarding its operations, activities, outcomes and recommendations.

3. Board of directors. The work of the center must be overseen by a board of directors composed of 17 members, of whom 4 members are ex officio, nonvoting members as specified in paragraph A and 13 members are appointed as specified in paragraph B. A member appointed pursuant to paragraph B is entitled to one vote.

A. Ex officio members of the board are:

(1) The Commissioner of Economic and Community Development or the commissioner's designee;

(2) The president of the Maine Technology Institute designated under section 15302 or the president's designee;

(3) The Chancellor of the University of Maine System or the chancellor's designee; and

(4) The Commissioner of Marine Resources or the commissioner's designee.

B. The members of the board who are not ex officio members are appointed by the Governor and are subject to confirmation by the Senate and must be individuals or

representatives of organizations that are in a position to advance the purposes and goals of the center and are able to have a significant effect on improving the State's blue economy sector. When making appointments under this paragraph, the Governor shall consider the multidisciplinary nature of the State's blue economy sector and the importance of diverse representation from coastal and rural communities and from businesses and shall consult with the board of directors of the Maine Technology Institute and the board of directors of the Finance Authority of Maine to ensure the alignment of those appointments with the State's economic development strategies. Membership under this paragraph must include:

- (1) A representative of a business in the State with fewer than 25 employees that is involved in the blue economy sector;
- (2) A representative of a business in the State with 25 or more employees that is involved in the blue economy sector;
- (3) A representative of a nonprofit marine or ocean science research institution based in the State that is involved in research and development in the blue economy sector;
- (4) A representative of a university, community college or trade school in the State that is involved in the blue economy sector, including marine or coastal environmental research in the Gulf of Maine;
- (5) A representative recommended by a federally recognized Indian tribe in the State;
- (6) Two representatives of trade associations or nonprofit organizations that support the blue economy sector, at least one of which collaborates directly with private sector marine industries;
- (7) A representative of business investors or the banking or finance sectors;
- (8) A representative of a privately owned commercial fishing or working waterfront business in the State;
- (9) A municipal official of a coastal community in the State;
- (10) A representative from the private sector with experience in sustainable aquaculture or marine vegetation cultivation in the State;
- (11) A representative with expertise in emerging ocean industries; and
- (12) A representative of a privately owned marine recreational tourism business or trade association.

Members of the board who are not ex officio members serve 3-year terms and may be reappointed.

C. The Governor shall designate a chair from among the board's members who shall preside at, set the agenda for and schedule meetings of the board.

D. Board members shall disclose any direct or indirect pecuniary interest in any matter brought to the center and recuse themselves from any participation in the consideration of such matters.

E. The board shall meet as often as it considers necessary to perform its work and, to the extent practicable, the board shall conduct its work in a manner that is open and accessible to the public. The board may conduct its work through subcommittees.

4. Operations of the center. The following provisions govern the operations of the center.

A. The center shall coordinate its activities with relevant state agencies, marine industry organizations, research institutions and regional economic development organizations in order to strengthen collaboration and avoid duplication of effort across the State's blue economy initiatives.

B. The center shall coordinate its activities with the other programs under the jurisdiction of the Maine Technology Institute, including any programs that promote life sciences and innovation in the State.

C. The center shall develop and implement a database composed of data that monitors the economic performance, workforce composition and environmental and resource trends in the Gulf of Maine that are relevant to the blue economy sector. The center shall assess economic performance by evaluating employment data of businesses within the blue economy sector, including wages paid to employees, the number of businesses operating within the blue economy sector and the revenue generated by those businesses.

D. To support its activities under this section, the center may seek outside funds, through direct solicitation or other fundraising methods, alone or with other groups, and may accept gifts, grants and bequests from individuals, corporations, foundations, governmental agencies and public and private organizations and may expend those funds for purposes consistent with this section.

5. Staff and administrative support. The Maine Technology Institute shall provide staff as may be necessary to fulfill the center's mission and may seek assistance from other state agencies and private entities to accomplish the goals and work of the center.

6. Annual report. The center shall submit annually to the Governor, the Executive Director of the Legislative Council and the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over economic development matters, no later than 120 days after the close of the center's fiscal year, a complete report on the activities of the center. The report must also be made available to the public. The report must include the following for that fiscal year:

A. A description of the center's operations and an assessment of trends and performance in the State's blue economy sector, including details on the methods used to assess and measure the center's economic development impacts on the blue economy sector;

B. An accounting of the center's receipts and expenditures, assets and liabilities at the end of its fiscal year;

C. A listing of all investments, grants, loans and incentives provided by the center during its fiscal year;

D. A statement of the center's proposed and projected activities for its ensuing fiscal year;

E. An analysis of workforce trends, investment activity and emerging opportunities in the State's blue economy sector;

F. The most recent data available on the size, composition and growth trends in the State's marine economy and environment that is compiled in the center's database pursuant to subsection 4, paragraph C; and

G. Recommendations regarding further actions that may be suitable for achieving the purposes of this subchapter.

After reviewing the report under this subsection, the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over economic development matters may report out legislation relating to the report.

Sec. 5. Maine Blue Economy Center; interim report. The Maine Blue Economy Center, established pursuant to the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 5, section 15341, shall submit an interim report to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over economic development matters no later than 60 days after all members of the board of directors of the center have been appointed pursuant to Title 5, 15341, subsection 3. The interim report must include, but is not limited to, the following:

1. A strategic plan, including proposed measures of success, for the center covering the subsequent 5-year period;
2. An operational plan identifying anticipated staff and partnership resources, proposed tasks and expected accomplishments; and
3. A finance plan identifying general operating expenditures, anticipated task-related and project-related expenditures and funding.

After reviewing the report under this section, the joint standing committee may report out legislation relating to the report.

Sec. 6. Staggered terms. Notwithstanding the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 5, section 15341, subsection 3, paragraph B, with regard to the initial appointments of the members of the board of directors of the Maine Blue Economy Center, the Governor shall appoint 4 members to a one-year term, 5 members to a 2-year term and 4 members to a 3-year term.

Sec. 7. Transfer. Notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary, the State Controller shall transfer \$160,000 from the Administration - Attorney General, Other Special Revenue Funds account within the Department of the Attorney General from funds received from settlement agreements to the unappropriated surplus of the General Fund no later than June 30, 2027.

Sec. 8. Appropriations and allocations. The following appropriations and allocations are made.

ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, DEPARTMENT OF

Maine Blue Economy Center N569

Initiative: Provides one-time funding to support the operations of the Maine Blue Economy Center.

GENERAL FUND

2025-26

2026-27

All Other	\$0	\$160,000
GENERAL FUND TOTAL	<u>\$0</u>	<u>\$160,000</u>