

May 5, 2023

Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife
c/o Legislative Information Office
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Re: LD 958, An Act to Expand Protections to Maine's Loons from Lead Poisoning by Prohibiting the Sale and Use of Certain Painted Lead Jigs

Dear Chair LaFountain, Chair Landry, and Members of the Committee:

The undersigned organizations, representing thousands of anglers in Maine, and tens of thousands nationally, strongly oppose LD 958, which would ban the use and sale of painted lead jigs in Maine's waters. The bill would ban traditional, commonly used tackle which has been sold and used across the state of Maine for decades. Given that it remains unclear if painted lead jigs are even toxic for loons, and the fact that Maine loon populations continue to increase in size despite the current use of painted jigs by anglers, banning the use of painted lead jigs will not address any identified, science-based need. We encourage the members of the Committee to oppose this legislation.

Several studies^[1,2] have found that there is no conclusive evidence to suggest the use of lead tackle in recreational fishing has adverse impacts on loons and swans at the population level. Loon populations are stable or increasing throughout their range and are assessed as a species of least concern by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.³ Furthermore, Maine Audubon's annual loon count shows a progressive recovery of the state's loon population over the past four decades.⁴ As wildlife is managed by state fish and wildlife agencies on the population-level, there is no scientific evidence that suggests that painted lead jigs impact loons beyond isolated, individual instances.

A ban on the sale and use of painted lead jigs would be detrimental not only to Maine's economy as a whole, but to funding for the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (DIFW) as well. Through the unique "user pays – public benefits" approach of the American System of Conservation Funding, state agencies like the DIFW derive significant portions of their funding through license sales and excise taxes on outdoor goods such as fishing rods, motorboat fuel and tackle such as painted lead jigs. The bans proposed by LD 958 would mandate anglers switch to costlier tackle alternatives, discouraging the purchasing of a fishing license as well as other sportfishing goods.

¹https://www.fishwildlife.org/application/files/9515/3719/5026/AFWA_Lead_Fishing_Tackle_Review_2018_FINAL.pdf

²<https://fisheries.legislature.ca.gov/sites/fisheries.legislature.ca.gov/files/CRB%20Report%20Lead%20Fishing%20Tackle%2002-2019%20online.pdf>

³ <https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/22697842/132607418>

⁴ <https://maineaudubon.org/projects/loons/annual-loon-count/>

In 2019, the sale of fishing licenses alone provided the DIFW with more than \$8.34 million, and the 2023 Maine apportionment from excise taxes revenues provided an additional \$4.24 million.^[5,6] Banning painted jig heads creates a barrier to participation that jeopardizes this crucial conservation funding.

On behalf of the following organizations, we urge the Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to oppose the passage of LD 958. As there is no scientific evidence that suggest painted lead jigs impact the health of the common loon population, legislation to ban the sale and use of popular, traditional tackle is unwarranted. The consequences of unnecessary regulations forcing anglers to purchase new, more costly alternatives may discourage participation in recreational fishing, leading to declining revenues for the DIFW and fewer resources for conservation. Thank you for your consideration and for the opportunity to comment on this proposal.

Sincerely,

American Catfishing Association
American Sportfishing Association
Bass Anglers Sportsman Society (B.A.S.S.)
The Bass Federation
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
International Game Fish Association
Maine B.A.S.S. Nation
Major League Fishing
National Professional Anglers Association
The Walleye Federation

⁵ https://s3.amazonaws.com/cdn.congressionalsportsmen.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/17201239/2019_Maine_ASCF_Sheet.pdf

⁶ <https://partnerwithapayer.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/SFR-Apportionment-2023-Handout.pdf>