



# SIERRA CLUB

## MAINE CHAPTER

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To: Committee on Marine Resources  
From: Matt Cannon, Sierra Club Maine  
Date: 5/24/2023  
Re: **Testimony in Support of LD 1951: An Act Regarding Marine Finfish Aquaculture**

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Senator Reny, Representative Hepler, and members of the Marine Resources Committee, I am testifying on behalf of Sierra Club Maine, representing over 22,000 supporters and members statewide. Founded in 1892, Sierra Club is one of our nation's oldest and largest environmental organizations. We work diligently to amplify the power of our 3.8 million members nation-wide as we work towards combating climate change and promoting a just and sustainable economy. To that end, we urge you to vote 'ought to pass' on LD 1951.

Overall, Sierra Club discourages the use of *net pen finfish* farming. We support the concept of this bill because we believe it lowers the likelihood of high density net pen projects polluting Maine's environment. Aquaculture in general is a tremendous opportunity for the State of Maine. Specifically, environmentally responsible shellfish and seaweed aquaculture, land-based zero-effluent and aquaponic polyculture will generate more jobs, while preserving our natural resources for all to utilize and enjoy. However, open water finfish net pens are of concern to environmental and community health.

The stocking density limits set out by LD 1951 would decrease risks to wild Atlantic salmon, marine resources, biodiversity, and public health. The proposed limit, based on extensive research, scientific study, and international precedent, would be achievable by industry and put Maine in similar standing to other jurisdictions.

We see this bill as one step in the right direction towards more comprehensively protecting our pristine waterways and wild fisheries. Sierra Club's policy for farming of fish and other aquatic organisms<sup>1</sup> states:

- 1. Cultivation of aquatic organisms in a manner that has a high potential to impact natural ecosystems, such as net-pen fish farming in coastal waters, should be discouraged.*
- 2. Aquaculture systems should include components that recycle wastes internal to the system.*
- 3. Multi-trophic aquaculture systems that integrate fish and plant ecosystems to process waste and optimize use of resources should be encouraged.*

Open water finfish net pens have been breeding grounds for infection, disease and parasites that have spread to wild salmon. In WA State, for example, there have been thousands of escaped Atlantic Salmon, a major viral outbreak and decades of pollution in their net pen finfish facilities.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sierraclub.org/policy/agriculture/food>

The bottom lands beneath these net-pens have become so polluted that these pens have had to be rotationally fallowed. Yet even so, they do not regain their original biodiversity and benthic health. Cooke Aquaculture (the only net pen company in Maine) leases in WA were not renewed because of the escape.<sup>2</sup>

Maine currently has no statutory limits on the biomass or stocking density of marine finfish farms. For reference, Chile has a stocking density of 17 kg/m<sup>3</sup>; Scotland has a high end of 20. Cooke operates in these countries and is subject to these regulations. In Canada, where Cooke Aquaculture is headquartered, the Canadian Aquaculture Industry Alliance has developed an (industry-led) binding corporate code of practice for salmon farms, which recommends that the maximum stocking density (referred to as biodensity) range between approximately 10–25 kg/m<sup>3</sup> in net pens.<sup>3</sup> Norway is also at 25kg/m<sup>3</sup>. We would offer to the committee that using a density limit of Chile would be the best first step.

As other nations continue to strengthen their regulations, Maine increasingly becomes a target for corporations looking to take advantage of our state's pristine waters and limited regulations. The Gulf of Maine is already under tremendous pressure from climate change, invasive species, and development along the coast. Specifically, nutrient loading from these types of projects and development amplified by the unprecedented warming in the Gulf of Maine is seriously concerning.

Additionally, Sierra Club is concerned for our wild fisheries and our harvesters regarding the spread of pathogens, disease and the taking of good bottom land and turning those hundreds of acres of net pens into waste-land. We should be using the precautionary principle with the future of our waters, and LD 1951 would be a step towards balancing the various pressures on our oceans without creating extra burden on resources and the environment. Without setting the initial cap outlined in LD 1951, we leave Maine waters vulnerable to dangerous and environmentally hazardous projects.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and we urge you to vote 'ought to pass' on LD 1951 and also continue to work on regulating this industry.

Sincerely,

Matt Cannon  
State Conservation & Energy Director  
Sierra Club Maine

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<sup>2</sup><https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/environment/wa-will-not-renew-leases-for-puget-sound-fish-farms-5-years-after-atlantic-salmon-spill/>

<sup>3</sup> From Atlantic Salmon Federation- [testimony here](#)