

Senator Reny, Representative Hepler, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources,

I'm submitting testimony on behalf of the Maine Association of Charterboat Captains in opposition to LD 2065 - An Act To Amend Maine's Aquaculture Leasing Laws..

Many of our members have significant concerns about the scale of aquaculture development in shallow waters and we have a number of captains who've lost access to valuable fishing sites. We are not opposed to all or even most aquaculture operations. We are aware that the explosive growth in all types of lease applications has placed a significant burden on the Department of Marine Resources and we can imagine that there is pressure from the aquaculture industry to accelerate the permitting processes.

Both our members and aquaculture operators are dependent upon use of a shared public resource. We don't have an opportunity to tie-up access to a flat or channel for 2 hours let alone 20 years.

All stakeholders should have an opportunity to participate in a public hearing for a lease renewal or a limited-purpose lease application if they so desire. The current minimum of 5 persons required to request a public hearing is appropriate. The LD 2065 proposed minimum of 25 persons is unduly burdensome to the public and other users of the resource. It tilts the table unfairly for one industry.

Expansion of a lease term from 2 years to 20 years is a significant step. Conversion of a limited-purpose lease to a standard lease deserves careful consideration and if passed, LD 2065 would diminish the opportunity for all stakeholders to participate in that 18-year extension.

The Department just this week announced five in-person listen sessions "as we plot a course for the future...moving forward with aquaculture in Maine". While we applaud this public outreach, the timing of it relative to this bill leaves us puzzled. Why change the rules BEFORE hearing from stakeholders?

We remain committed to working with the Department, this committee, and aquaculture operators to allow our respective industries to thrive with shared access to what is critical habitat for both of us. Let's at least hear from the public at the upcoming aquaculture listening sessions before altering the application or extension process.

I urge you to vote "ought not to pass" on LD 2065. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Peter

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