

To: Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs
From: Ben Martens, Executive Director
Date: March 5th, 2024

Re: An Act to Provide Funding to Rebuild Infrastructure Affected by Extreme Inland and Coastal Weather Events

Honorable Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs,

The Maine Coast Fishermen's Association (MCFA) is writing to express our strong support for LD 2225 **An Act to Provide Funding to Rebuild Infrastructure Affected by Extreme Inland and Coastal Weather Events** which seeks to allocate \$50,000,000 from the Maine Budget Stabilization Fund to the Department of Transportation's Infrastructure Adaptation Fund for critical infrastructure adaptation, repair, and improvements. This funding is urgently needed to address the recent damage caused by the January storms and to bolster the resilience of Maine's commercial fishing infrastructure, specifically the working waterfront.

We express our gratitude to Governor Mills and Commissioner Keliher for their commendable efforts in the aftermath of the storms. The Department of Marine Resources faced unprecedented challenges but swiftly mobilized, collaborating with Marine Patrol and the Governor's office to assess the impact, disseminate crucial information, and pinpoint resources vital for the restoration of the working waterfront. Among these indispensable resources, L.D. 2225 stands out as a crucial tool in this rebuilding process.

The working waterfront in Maine plays a pivotal role in supporting economic activities in coastal communities. Many of these vital working waterfronts are situated on private properties, which have limited funding sources. The proposed legislation rightly recognizes the gravity of this situation and aims to provide funds to address essential infrastructure needs of the commercial fishing community.

“Funds will be used for public infrastructure projects with project exemptions available for some types of private infrastructure upgrades with significant community benefits, such as working waterfronts.”

In addition to the limited funding available to commercial fishing properties, the ability to build back stronger and better is hindered by funding, permitting, and capacity. It will be paramount for some of Maine's larger working waterfront properties that offer essential services like bait and fuel, and provide a place for buying and selling lobsters, are able to grow in a way that accommodates more fishermen who may have lost their smaller wharves and are unable to build back. Because of this, we ask that as few restrictions as possible are enacted on these funds, and that the Department of Marine Resources is empowered to disperse the funds as quickly and efficiently as possible. This should include the capability to reimburse businesses for work that has already been completed or is in progress because many properties have had to undertake immediate work to become operational or prevent further damage.

We'd also like to recognize the diverse range of working waterfronts utilized by commercial fishermen. These include small, discrete working waterfronts that serve a couple of fishermen, co-operatives, family-owned sites, and larger spaces dedicated to buying and selling lobster. All of these properties contribute significantly to both the culture and economics in coastal communities and play a crucial role in Maine's vital seafood system.

Working waterfronts also play a critical role in the health and well-being of fishermen and coastal communities. Solastalgia, a term coined by Australian environmental philosopher Glenn Albrecht, is the feeling of homesickness when you're already at home. It refers to the distress or unease experienced by individuals when they witness the negative transformation of their home environment, typically due to things like environmental changes, severe storms, gentrification, or development. Many fishermen are mourning the loss of their familiar spaces that were devastated by the January storms. Providing funding for them to rebuild not only supports their businesses but also contributes to their overall well-being.

It will be important that the DMR identify priorities to ensure the funding is dispersed equitably but this is no simple feat. Each coastal community has unique accessibility and infrastructure needs based on factors like the number of fishermen, coastal geography, rural nature, and specific goals. The DMR can better cater to each community's distinct needs if not hindered by broad metrics or one-size-fits-all standards.

By supporting LD 2225, especially the *exemption for private infrastructure with significant community benefits*, you will contribute to the preservation of Maine's iconic working waterfronts and support the economic well-being of our coastal communities that rely heavily on commercial fishing for their own economic prosperity.

In Maine, the sole funding opportunity for private infrastructure on working waterfronts is the Land for Maine's Future (LMF) Working Waterfront Access Protection Program (WWAPP). Although this program offers some funding for waterfront infrastructure investment, it requires the relinquishment of development rights and is too slow to promptly address the damage caused by the current storm. We fully support this program, but also want to acknowledge that it is not a good fit for the crisis which our working waterfront currently are operating within.

I urge you to approve LD 2225 promptly, recognizing the urgency of the situation and the positive impact it will have on Maine's working waterfront and overall infrastructure resiliency.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ben Martens". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "B" and a long, sweeping underline.

Ben Martens
Executive Director

Ben Martens
Maine Coast Fishermen's Association
LD 2225

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