

**Written Testimony to
The Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development
Testimony of Maine Aquaculture Innovation Center**

In Support of LD 1023

Resolve, to Reestablish and Continue the Work of the Maine Blue Economy Task Force

March 27, 2025

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My name is Dr Anne Langston Noll, and I represent the Maine Aquaculture Innovation Center. I am honored to testify in support of LD 1023, which seeks to reestablish and continue the work of the Maine Blue Economy Task Force.

As a member of the Maine Blue Economy Task Force, I was pleased to work with a group of people passionate about our Blue Economy, and I can assure you that our work has highlighted the critical importance of the blue economy to Maine's future. The blue economy represents a sustainable and equitable ocean economy that optimizes innovation to expand economic opportunities in our coastal communities and working waterfronts. Maine is uniquely positioned for this sector, with our abundant marine resources, skilled workforce, and rich maritime heritage.

However, we cannot overlook the challenges that currently hold us back. The Task Force has identified several barriers, including a fragmented blue economy strategy, slow regulatory processes, and limited investment. These challenges must be addressed if Maine is to capitalize on the opportunities available to us.

The potential for growth in Maine's blue economy is significant. Areas such as sustainable seafood production (both farmed and wild harvested), seaweed-based products (both food and non-food), marine biotechnology, ocean data and marine research, resilient coastal infrastructure, and sustainable boatbuilding offer pathways for economic development that can create jobs and drive innovation. We have seen competitor states rapidly advance in these areas, and it is imperative that Maine accelerates its support for the blue economy to avoid falling behind.

Supporting LD 1023 is essential for the continued work of the Task Force, which has already provided valuable recommendations to enhance Maine's position in the blue economy. These recommendations include establishing a Maine Center for the Blue Economy, prioritizing state investment in research and development, and streamlining regulatory processes to encourage investment.

Maine Aquaculture Innovation Center's (MAIC) insight into Maine's Blue Economy potential. Established in 1988, MAIC sponsors, conducts, and facilitates innovative research, development and workforce projects involving food and non-food products from sustainable aquatic systems. In partnership with the University of Maine, MAIC manages two aquaculture business incubation facilities. Since 2007, MAIC has worked with 11 business incubator tenants in the past 20 years at the Darling Marine Center.

One of these businesses - Sara Rademaker's American Unagi - recently won the prestigious "Best New Foodservice Product" award for its "Gluten Free Eel Kabayaki Fillet" at the recent Seafood Expo North America in Boston. American Unagi aims to disrupt the traditional eel supply chain by raising eels domestically, creating jobs, supporting local economies, and reducing reliance on imported eels, thereby offering a sustainable and traceable seafood option. American Unagi is creating sustainable jobs in rural Maine, both directly within the farm and indirectly through supporting local fisheries and related businesses. By working with licensed Maine glass eel harvesters, American Unagi supports the local eel fishery and provides a stable market for elvers. American Unagi is also working in partnership with the Passamaquoddy Tribe, creating economic opportunities for tribal members and supporting the tribe's programs and services. This is just one example of Maine's innovative sustainable seafood production sector.

In addition to supporting business incubator tenants, MAIC invests in the enhancement of aquaculture capacity through small grant programs. One of these programs is the MAIC Farmer-to-Farmer Exchange program, which launched in 2022. This program enables Maine's aquaculturists to undertake technology and knowledge transfer by visiting farmers elsewhere in the U.S. or internationally. To date we have supported 18 aquaculturists farmer to farmer exchanges. A second program, the MAIC Business and Economic Research program also launched in 2022, provides business planning and market research support to entrepreneurial aquaculture businesses in Maine. To date this has supported 15 businesses exploring new or expanding markets, and/or market potential for new value-added products.

Together these programs demonstrate the vibrancy and potential of Maine's sustainable aquaculture sector - just one small part of the Blue Economy.

In conclusion, I urge you to support LD 1023. By doing so, we can ensure that Maine harnesses its unique strengths to become a leader in the blue economy, creating opportunities for current and future generations. Thank you for considering my testimony, and I look forward to your questions.

Sincerely,

Anne Langston Noll, PhD, MSc, MA
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