



**Testimony to the Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources
In Support of
LD 1596, An Act to Support Maine's Sea Farmers**

April 25, 2025

Senator Tepler, Representative Helper, Representative Reilly, and Honorable Members of the Joint Committee on Marine Resources:

My name is Jennifer Robinson, and I am the compliance officer for Cooke USA, responsible for the company's Maine Atlantic salmon operations. I am testifying in support of LD 1596, An Act to Support Maine's Sea Farmers.

Cooke USA has been farming Atlantic salmon in the Gulf of Maine since 2004. We operate a number of marine farm sites throughout Hancock and Washington counties, a processing plant in Machiasport and three freshwater hatcheries – two in western Maine and one in eastern Maine. Our fish are sold at supermarkets and restaurants throughout New England and across the United States. We employ approximately 230 people throughout Maine. We are proud of our contributions to Maine's seafood economy and working waterfront.

In my role, I am responsible for managing the leasing and permitting process for Cooke's marine farm sites, and I interact with a number of state and federal regulatory agencies, including the Maine Department of Marine Resources (DMR). Maine has one of the most rigorous aquaculture leasing and permitting processes in country, perhaps in the world. I commend DMR's staff for the work that it does to uphold the state's laws and regulations.

At the same time, I recognize that there's an opportunity to reduce the administrative workload on DMR to allow the agency to focus on its mission of conserving and developing the state's marine and estuarine resources. LD 1596 would establish clear thresholds that would trigger the need for a lease amendment while allowing farmers to innovate without the burden of waiting months to receive approval for a change in gear or operations. For aquaculture production methods to remain economically viable and ecologically sustainable, farmers must constantly adopt new technology and equipment. For Atlantic salmon farmers like Cooke USA, innovation is a necessity to remain competitive in a highly competitive international business.



Last year, DMR held a series of listening sessions open to the public. Representatives of Cooke USA were among the participants, and one the main challenges cited by farmers was the time associated with attaining a lease amendment or a new lease. This is a challenge for *all* Maine aquaculture farmers.

Thank you for the opportunity testify in support of LD 1596, An Act to Support Maine's Sea Farmers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Jennifer Robinson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name and last name clearly legible.

Jennifer Robinson
Compliance Officer
Cooke USA