



Testimony of Island Institute in Support of LD 1845 An Act to Establish the Working Waterfront Advisory Council

May 8, 2025

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and Members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee, my name is Nick Battista, and I am testifying on behalf of Island Institute in support of LD 1845.

Island Institute is a 42-year-old nonprofit organization based in Rockland, Maine. We boldly navigate climate and economic change with island and coastal communities to expand opportunities and deliver solutions. Much of our work takes place in the communities that are highly dependent on fishing, and the bulk of these communities are east of Damariscotta. The economy of these communities is closely tied to fishing and aquaculture, and these industries rely heavily on working waterfront infrastructure.

Island Institute currently coordinates the Working Waterfront Coalition, a group of organizations, entities, and individuals who are deeply involved in the State's working waterfront infrastructure conversation. The Coalition itself has members who aren't able or comfortable with testifying, however the importance of working waterfronts and the needs that this legislation hopes to address have been the subject of significant conversations.

The January 2024 storms highlighted the role working waterfront infrastructure plays in Maine's coastal communities. These storms helped focus attention on the needs of working waterfronts. In the wake of the January 2024 storms, Island Institute provided \$250,000 in grants to 52 working waterfronts. These businesses employed 540 people directly and supported the economic activity of another 1195 commercial boats. Most of these boats help another 2 or 3 people make a living. We are grateful for the \$25 Million the Legislature approved last session for working waterfront resilience.

Maine Won't Wait, the State's climate action plan dedicates a strategy – F5 – to protecting working waterfront infrastructure, and this strategy says in part that "Maine's working waterfronts are vital to the state, both economically and culturally, and access to the ocean is crucial to Maine's identity."

The recently released Infrastructure Resilience and Resilience Commission report included 11 high level recommendations, one of those about working waterfronts – "Protect and promote resilience across a diverse mix of public and privately owned working waterfront infrastructure." The recommendation further says:

To continue Maine's long history of a diverse working waterfront along the coastline, Maine needs to implement local and regional approaches that protect and support a mix of public and privately owned working waterfront infrastructure, in part by developing tools and support for all types of working waterfront infrastructure. To maintain public working waterfront infrastructure as the long-term backbone for commercial fisheries and other blue economy sectors in Maine, Maine should invest in resilience upgrades and ongoing maintenance to withstand future sea level rise and extreme storms. To support privately owned working waterfront infrastructure, Maine should invest in providing support services, including technical assistance to complete resiliency upgrades, engineering and permitting support, and business planning support for future generations enabling strong working waterfront businesses and helping avoid the need for rapid crisis response.

A copy of the report can be found online here -

https://www.maine.gov/future/sites/maine.gov.future/files/inline-files/Maine%20Infrastructure%20Resilience%20Plan_May2025.pdf

The distinction between public and privately owned infrastructure is critical. The vast majority of the most important and significant working waterfronts in the State are privately owned. These private businesses provide a public good – access to our marine resources as well as a base of operations for numerous other small businesses. These private businesses require different strategies to provide influence and support than publicly owned infrastructure – and the shoreland zone is a very complicated place.

As the Maine Office of Community Affairs undertakes work with working waterfronts, we appreciate Director Horn's willingness to work with an advisor council on these tricky and challenging issues.

Finally, it is worth noting that Island Institute very much appreciates the attention the State is paying to the needs of working waterfronts. Thank you for considering this bill to help ensure Maine's fishing heritage continues into the future. I urge the Committee to support LD 1845 and Maine's working waterfronts.