



5 February 2025

To: Joint Committee on Marine Resources

RE: LD 1991, In support

Senator Tepler, Representative Hepler, and honorable members of the Committee on Marine Resources:

I am a resident of Pembroke, in Washington County, writing as Executive Director and Senior Scientist of the Maine Rockweed Coalition in support of LD 1991.

The Maine Rockweed Coalition is a statewide organization whose mission is promoting the conservation of subtidal and intertidal marine habitat, including seaweed forests of rockweed and kelp. These wild seaweed forests are both commercial fishery habitat and the target of a commercial harvest themselves.

SUMMARY: The Maine Rockweed Coalition, the Department of Marine Resources, the Maine Seaweed Council and numerous conservation entities support a sustainable rockweed harvest in Maine. **Harvester education is key to sustainable seaweed harvests, including rockweed harvests.**

To explain the basis for our support of this bill:

For the past 5 harvest seasons, we at the Maine Rockweed Coalition have closely observed rockweed harvests going on in Washington County, especially Cobscook Bay. These observations point to a serious need for rockweed harvester education before harvesters receive a seaweed permit from the Department.

1. Rockweed harvesters have a direct impact on whether rockweed harvests are sustainable and follow the state regulations. One of the most important state regulations for harvest is **not removing the whole rockweed plant**; cutting the top of rockweed but leaving the root-like structure plus 16" of plant attached to rock.

Harvesters using rakes have to use a sharp blade on their rake in order to slice the rockweed above the holdfast. If the blade is not sharp, the rake acts as a dredge or a drag, pulling up whole rockweed plants into the boat. This violates regulations.

We have observed the “dredging” of whole rockweed trees directly (via [VIDEO of harvesting](#)) and from loads of harvested rockweed photographed from bales of harvested rockweed washed up on a beach in 2022 containing whole rockweed “trees”, some six feet tall (see FIG. 1).

Fig. 1. Six foot tall rockweed “tree”, with holdfast, removed and measured from a sampled bag of harvested rockweed, Cobscook Bay, 2022



Sharpening the rake blade before going out to cut rockweed is extra work for the harvester, and with no one watching harvesters to make sure they understand the importance of a sharp rake blade, our observations have shown that they usually do not sharpen. Most harvesters in Cobscook Bay appear for one season or less, and why would they be self-motivated to harvest for sustainability when they are paid by the pound?

2. The second glaring need for harvester education is legal education: to educate harvesters that rockweed, as of a 2019 Maine Supreme Court decision, is the property of the intertidal landowner and therefore harvesting rockweed anywhere in Maine requires the harvester to get permission of the landowner.

Maine Rockweed Coalition looks forward to opportunities to provide input on the scope and details of required education for rockweed and other seaweed harvesters.

We strongly support LD 1991 for sustainable seaweed harvests in support of commercial fisheries that depend on these seaweed habitats, and urge you to vote Ought to Pass on LD 1991.

Sincerely,



Robin Hadlock Seeley, Ph.D.

Executive Director and Senior Scientist

Maine Rockweed Coalition

info@mainerockweedcoalition.org

References:

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["A reexamination of Johnston et al., 2023, bed-scale impact and recovery of a commercially important intertidal seaweed."](#) Journal of Experimental Marine Biology and Ecology. DOI: 10.1016/j.jembe.2023.151984

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["Sustainable seaweed cutting? The rockweed \(*Ascophyllum nodosum*\) industry of Maine and the Maritime Provinces."](#) Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences 1249: 84-103. doi: 10.1111/j.1749-6632.2012.06443.x.