



MAINE

Lobstermen's Association, Inc.

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Testimony of Patrice McCarron
Executive Director of the Maine Lobstermen's Association

In Support of the Department of Marine Resources Biennial Budget (LD 258)

Before the Joint Committees on
Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Marine Resources
February 16, 2023

Senators Rotundo and Reny, Representatives Sachs and Hepler, and members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Marine Resources, my name is Patrice McCarron. I am the Executive Director of the Maine Lobstermen's Association (MLA). MLA is Maine's oldest and largest fishing industry organization whose mission is to advocate for a sustainable lobster resource and the fishermen and communities that depend on it.

A well-funded Department of Marine Resources (DMR) is essential to the vitality and sustainability of Maine's fishing industries, and the thousands of fishermen, families, businesses and communities it supports. The MLA supports the DMR's Biennial Budget as presented, but today, I want to highlight the importance of your support for two provisions of the budget: 1) investing \$3.6 million plus ongoing maintenance costs to acquire and support a new Marine Patrol aircraft and 2) funding an enhanced fuel budget to support Marine Patrol's assets.

Why should the state prioritize these investments? Because these investments are essential to supporting Maine's lobster industry and the lobster industry is essential to economy, heritage and cultural identity of the state of Maine.

Maine's lobster industry accounts for more than 80% of the value of Maine's commercial fisheries. DMR licenses 4,800 lobstermen who support 12,000 jobs on the water. These lobstermen landed more than \$700 million of lobster at the dock in 2021. Each lobsterman represents a small business based in one of Maine's rural coastal communities, which means each of those \$700 million is spent locally. This does not include the more than 5,000 jobs and nearly \$1 billion in revenue generated by Maine's lobster supply chain, or the hundreds of local businesses, banks and town budgets that are fueled directly by lobster dollars.

A lot has changed in the Maine lobster fishery in recent years, so the state must change how it invests to support this critical industry. The lobster fishery is extremely diverse supporting very small inshore boats to larger, technologically sophisticated boats that fish out to 40 miles from shore. Maine's offshore lobster fleet, comprised of over 1,300 vessels, continues to grow in importance as it accounts for a greater proportion of overall value of lobster landings each year. Supporting a new aircraft will allow the Marine Patrol to fill the growing gap in supporting the offshore fleet in its essential enforcement, search and rescue and monitoring activities in the future.

You have probably heard about some of the threats facing Maine's lobster fishery due to the decline in the right whale population. Despite a lack of evidence connecting Maine lobster gear to any right whale death, Maine's lobster fishery is facing unprecedented challenges as the federal government moves forward its plan to require extreme changes to the fishery intended to recover these whales. Supporting a new aircraft will also allow Marine Patrol to conduct aerial surveys to document the presence or absence of right whales along the Maine coast in relation to fishing activity. This could prevent over-regulation or shut down of the lobster industry – now facing a 98% risk reduction -- if whales are not present, and provide flexibility to dynamically manage fishing effort if right whales are found overlap with Maine fishing gear.

In summary, an investment by the state of Maine in a new Marine Patrol aircraft and increased fuel budget is not only an investment in ensuring DMR has adequate resources to support our offshore fleet through enforcement, search and rescue services, surveillance and aerial surveys to monitor right whales, but it is also an investment in preserving a future for Maine's fishing industry, our coastal communities and our heritage.

Thank you.