



February 16, 2023

The Honorable Margaret Rotundo, Senate Chair
The Honorable Melanie Sachs, House Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs
State House, Room 228
Augusta, ME 04333

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, Honorable members of the Joint Committee on Marine Resources:

My name is Sebastian Belle and I am the Executive Director of the Maine Aquaculture Association (MAA). I stand before you today to testify in strong support of the proposed biennial budget request for the Department of Marine Resources. The MAA represents Maine's aquatic farmers and the many infrastructure companies that provide goods and services to our producers. Our farmers annually produce over 100 million dollars in farm gate revenue and directly employ roughly 700 Maine citizens year-round. We purchase goods and services from over 400 Maine businesses and our total economic impact is roughly 150 million dollars annually.

The Department of Marine Resources and the Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources both work hard to protect and manage the valuable resources that form the foundation of this economic engine. In order to operate, our farmers lease roughly 1700 acres of public waters annually. We acquire permission to use those few acres by going through a rigorous, transparent adjudicatory process that has been developed by the state over a forty-five-year period. The leasing process includes three public meetings, including a formal public hearing and a review by state and federal authorities to ensure the lease will comply with a series of technical criteria designed to protect the public trust, the environment and to ensure there are no other significant uses of the area. Once a lease is granted, the farmer must comply with a series of specific lease conditions and a strict set of state and federal environmental regulations. The Maine aquaculture leasing system is seen as the gold standard and many other states and even countries have modeled their aquaculture management programs on Maine's system.

The Department of Marine Resources biennial budget request has a number of components that are important to our members. In particular, MAA supports the request by the Department for additional resources for the Marine Patrol, Bureau of Public Health and the establishment of a Maintenance Fund for the Department's fleet of vessels. All of these functions are vital to our members.

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Maine has a long tradition of producing high quality, healthy seafood that has supported the strong Maine brand identity. Maine seafood is an iconic part of the Maine brand and Maine aquaculture products have earned their place as part of that brand. Please help us continue to build that brand and give DMR the resources they need to help us grow and defend Maines working waterfronts. I thank you for your attention and patience and would be glad to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Belle'.

Sebastian M. Belle
Executive Director