

April 11, 2023

The Honorable Chip Curry, Senate Chair
The Honorable Tiffany Roberts, House Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business
State House, Room 206
Augusta, ME 04333

Senator Curry, Representative Roberts, Honorable members of the Joint Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business:

My name is Sebastian Belle and I am the Executive Director of the Maine Aquaculture Association (MAA) and the current president of the National Aquaculture Association (NAA). The MAA is the oldest state aquaculture association in the country. We represent Maine's aquatic farmers that raise finfish, shellfish and sea vegetables. 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.

I stand before you today to testify in support of LD 1286 "A Resolve to Establish the Blue Economy Task Force to Support Maine's Emergence as a Center for Blue Economy Innovation and Opportunity in the 21st Century."

The blue economy concept seeks to promote economic growth, social inclusion, and preservation or improvement of livelihoods, while at the same time ensuring environmental sustainability. It allows for the commercial development of ocean resources while ensuring that those activities are sustainable and adaptive to changing ecosystems and human population demographics. The emergence of blue economy initiatives is happening rapidly internationally and the United States is, frankly, behind many other countries that we compete with both economically and geopolitically.

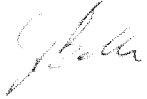
Maine is uniquely positioned to become a national leader in the development of a dynamic blue economy. We are already a leader in marine resource management and aquaculture. Maine has the best cold water marine aquaculture research infrastructure in North America. We lead in marine renewable energy R&D and have some of the best marine transportation training facilities in the United States. The development of a Blue Economy Task Force would facilitate a systematic appraisal of how Maine can capitalize on these strengths and position ourselves to take advantage of rapidly emerging market opportunities.

While we support LD1286, the MAA has a number of suggestions to improve the proposal:

1. Two critical institutions have been left out in the proposed task force membership. In addition to the proposed aquaculture representatives, the Maine Aquaculture Innovation Center (MAIC) and the University of Maine Aquaculture Research Institute (ARI) should be added as members. Both of these institutions form the core of the state's world class aquaculture research community.
2. Add a representative from Focus Maine, which has led and helped fund critical economic development work in Maine's marine economy over the last 7 years.
3. Given the proposed scope of work for the task force and the fact that SEAMaine will not complete its work until this fall, the time frame within which the task force conducts its work should be lengthened by one year.
4. The task force should be given a directive to not only "consider" the recommendations of the Aquaculture and Offshore Wind Roadmaps and SEAMaine Reports, but to include their recommendations and identify what resources are necessary to implement said recommendations. The task force should also identify the potential sources of those resources and be empowered to recommend draft legislation to dispense those resources and implement any other recommendations it develops in order to facilitate Maine's emergence as a Center of Excellence for a Blue Economy.

Please vote "OUGHT TO PASS as amended with the above recommendations" on LD 1286. I thank you for your attention and patience and would be glad to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



Sebastian Belle
Executive Director