

April 11, 2023

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

My name is Dr. Charles Tilburg, and I am the Doherty Chair of Marine Sciences Research and the Academic Director of the School of Marine and Environmental Programs at the University of New England. UNE is submitting testimony in support of LD 1286.

The Blue Economy is a potentially massive emerging field that can help Maine become relevant in a way that we have not seen in years. Maine has tremendous opportunities for development and growth regarding the Blue Economy; however, it is not clear how we should dedicate our resources and energy. This task force will help us determine how we should proceed in a strategic and forward-thinking way.

Other states like New Hampshire and Massachusetts are already coalescing around the Blue Economy. Our coastline (and therefore potential) dwarfs theirs, and we should not allow ourselves to be left behind.

Currently, we do not have a central place for academics, nonprofits, industry, and other stakeholders to come together and plan how to take Maine to the next level regarding this economy. We cannot rely on an ad hoc approach to take advantage of these opportunities. This task force would be the vehicle for formulating and advancing our plans.

With the influx of new residents, we must be ready to support our sustainable, resilient coastal communities and protect the natural resources that make Maine the special place it is (our salt marshes, iconic coastal communities, lobsters, seafood, etc.). We cannot manage this change by just saying "No," we must work with other stakeholders to come up with strategic initiatives to help Maine thrive.



INNOVATION FOR A HEALTHIER PLANET

In the wake of Maine's climate change initiatives and its goal to develop a sensible carbon budget, we cannot ignore the growing Blue Economy. This task force will provide the expertise to contribute to these discussions and will help ensure that our plans around the Blue Economy are aligned with other State initiatives.

The University of New England has been training students in Marine Entrepreneurship, Marine Affairs, Aquaculture & Aquarium Science, and now Sustainable Ecological Aquaculture to take advantage of this new economic landscape. In addition, we have a newly designed Professional Science Masters in Ocean Food Systems aimed at providing professionals in the ocean foods industry with additional education to further their careers. Our enrollments are exploding, bringing more and more students to Maine. However, we are seeing too many of these graduates then leave the state to pursue professional opportunities elsewhere. This task force can help us determine how to both grow our economy and keep our students in state.

UNE is poised to provide more and more students to the economy, new research methods and techniques to blue industries, and business expertise to the economy. We can help in Maine's exploration of the Blue Economy, and we would be happy to take part in this task force.

We would recommend, if the committee wishes to move forward with this legislation, that you amend the membership of the task force to include Community College and tribal representatives.

This task force will provide a unified perspective, an avenue to plan and strategize, and the means for Maine to compete with other coastal states and take advantage of the abundant resources that this great state has to offer. For these reasons, we urge you to support LD 1286.