

Senator Brenner, Representative Gramlich, distinguished members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee

My name is James Balano. My wife Robin McCoy and I are owners of the Wheeler's Bay Oyster Company in St. George. We oppose LD 508.

I'm from a Port Clyde sailing ship and fishing family. I grew up around the water. In 1973 I went offshore lobstering with Bobby Brown on the Sea Fever. He was the fisherman from Marblehead who owned the Andrea Gail and the Hannah Boden from The Perfect Storm by Sebastian Unger. I fished for lobster in my own boat from Monhegan during the rest of the 70's. In the off season we went purse seining for the bait market. I then went deep sea and became captain of a 625-foot Toyota car carrier bringing cars to the U.S. East and West coasts from Toyohashi, Japan. I was captain of the Overseas Joyce for 20 years.

For the third time in as many years the same people are trying to hamstring aquaculture in Maine. Both LD 1146 and LD 1211 were defeated before the Marine Resources Committee within 3 weeks of each other. This time the bill language was intentionally held confidential until the last moment so the aquaculture community could not mount an effective opposition. The architects of this proposed bill are very good at public relations and lobbying. What exactly is the end game here since it's very clear they care nothing at all for Maine fishermen, Maine's fishing heritage or the working waterfront? Where would we end up if we followed the money? Clearly, this kind of concerted effort over many years has that smell.

The big joke is that this so-called "study group" of 17 "so-called stakeholders" will be comprised of just two people from the aquaculture community. Was it C. S. Lewis who said that a committee is the most-evil thing in the world?

A late amendment restricting the bill to finfish is a strategy to defuse opposition by playing different sectors of the aquaculture community against each other. It doesn't change the long game. In local meetings nothing was said about restricting it to finfish. It's a foot in the door. The chance that such a committee will find better scientific or regulatory answers is guaranteed to be zero. Despite the pusher's loud claims to be all for aquaculture, this is not a friendly initiative. Input from laymen with multiple conflicting **opinions** will deliberately create the kind of morass that exists now in California where aquaculture went to die.

This is mainly about lease size. They would like to cap leases at 5 acres. This would severely limit the ability to create a real business. They would like to see a potentially dynamic industry reduced to boutique mom and pop farming. They claim to be protecting Maine from out of state and foreign venture capitalists. But what if Maine people themselves want to grow a business?

These people know exactly which buttons to push. Fear of 'outsiders' and 'the other' have always been a means of manipulation. They have been pushing these buttons up and down the coast starting first in the north. They know exactly which groups or people to turn against each other. Who benefits from range war but the people who claim the land after everyone else is dead?

We don't need more studies. We need more aquaculture staff for DMR which has been doing a great job. There have been 24 studies over the last 30 years and Maine is now the model for the rest of the nation when it comes to state regulation of aquaculture. Another study is just a waste of resources

which would only reduce funds to properly administer all the excellent policies and practices already in place. Perhaps this is the intent.

There is already a de facto moratorium on new leases due to the recent nearly 100% turnover of staff in the DMR Aquaculture Division. My neighbors on Wheeler's Bay are looking at waits of a year and a half to convert their 4-acre experimental Kelp farms to standard leases. They are all lobster fishermen. They are all looking to aquaculture as a hedge against the long-predicted demise of the lobster industry. As such, they are hoping for a return on investment commensurate with their customary level of income – not some boutique level supplemental income. Their buyers of product and suppliers of seed are a Maine corporation started by Maine entrepreneurs, not outsiders. I helped one of my fishing neighbors write an experimental lease for 4 acres. He would like to expand it to 16 when he converts to a standard lease.

At a recent meeting in our area, a person near me questioned the sincerity of one of the presenters advocating a moratorium and a 5-acre cap on leases. This person is the marine biologist who hired on with the pushers of LD 508 to give them credibility. The question of sincerity is in reference to his association with a multi-million-dollar project at the old Wildcat lobster pound in Tenant's Harbor to grow market sized oysters in one year. While he decries the influence of 'big money' on aquaculture in Maine, he justified his business association with the 'big money' project because it "is doing aquaculture as it should be done". This struck us both as not only arrogant but completely incoherent.

Thankyou and again I urge you to vote not to allow LD 508 to pass.