



Testimony of the Island Institute in Support of LD 1552, An Act to Create the Lobster Innovation Fund
April 27th, 2023

Senator Reny, Representative Hepler, and members of the Committee on Marine Resources, my name is Nick Battista, and I offer this testimony on behalf of the Island Institute in support of LD 1552, An Act to Create the Lobster Innovation Fund.

The Island Institute is a 40-year-old nonprofit organization based in Rockland, Maine. We work to sustain Maine's island and coastal communities. 10% of the population in many of the communities we work with hold lobster licenses, and in some communities, those numbers rise to 20% or even more. Through our work, we are deeply familiar with the complex challenges facing our coast and the connection between activity on the water and coastal communities.

The issues facing the lobster posed by regulations to protect endangered whales are some of the most significant challenges that Maine's coastal communities will face over the next 10 years. Even though the Maine lobster fishery complies with federal statutes for the next 5 and a half years or so, now is the time to invest in the scientific understanding that underlies the modeling and drives the risk reduction calculations. This is also the critical moment for the State to build a better understanding of the operational, technical, financial, enforcement, and other challenges accompanying innovative gear technologies that pose less risk to whales.

Doing this work today and over the next few years is a critical part of ensuring that Maine's lobster fishery and the coastal communities that rely on the fishery will still have a fishery that can support them. Maine's lobster fishery is broad, diverse and has many different operational and business models. Developing a better understanding of what might work, what does not work, and where further innovation is needed is critical to the future of our coastal communities.

By testing innovative gear, fishermen are continuing their 100-year history of innovation and adaptation and are helping to secure the future for their own businesses and their families' businesses. Testing, documenting, learning, and sharing information about how that gear works, as well as dealing with technologies and equipment that is not ready for prime time, means that the fishermen will be able to haul fewer traps in a day, take more days off the water to attend meetings and see a very real reduction in their income. Modest stipends to help encourage participation in testing innovative solutions are very appropriate and will ultimately allow the State to participate more effectively in future regulatory proceedings.

We strongly support this bill.