



**MAINE
AQUACULTURE
ASSOCIATION**

February 1, 2024

The Honorable Cameron Reny, Senate Chair
The Honorable Allison Hepler, House Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources
State House, Room 206
Augusta, ME. 04333

Senator Reny, Representative Hepler, 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) 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 2065 "An Act to Amend Maine's Aquaculture Leasing Laws."

Despite what some opponents of the bill may say LD 2065 does NOT reduce the public's ability to have input into the leasing process. Nor does it reduce the Department's authority to require a hearing if they deem it necessary to gather information and data relevant to the leasing decision. LD 2065 increases from 14 to 30 the number of days comments can be submitted on a proposed lease transfer giving the public MORE time to comment. The bill establishes strict limits on how a Limited Purpose Lease may be converted to a Standard Lease. In order to qualify for the lease conversion process established in the bill, LD 2065 requires that any conversion of a Limited Purpose Lease to a Standard Lease does NOT substantively change the activity permitted on the lease and does NOT change the lease area.

Although MAA SUPPORTS LD 2065 we do OPPOSE one part of the bill that establishes the lease conversion process outlined in the bill.

Sec. 7. 12 MRSA §6072, sub-§12-D. D. states "to evaluate the possible effects of the lease conversion on any **new uses** (my emphasis added) of the area." MAA's position is that if a Limited Purpose Lease has been in place for some time, has not had any violations or complaints, and its operator has complied with any conditions placed on the lease as part of the lease contract, the fact that a "new use" has emerged around the lease should not be a factor considered in the conversion of the preexisting Limited

Purpose Lease to a Standard Lease. The existence of the Limited Purpose Lease prior to the new use should take precedence. We are not suggesting that a new use should be prohibited rather that its existence should not be taken into account during the conversion process because the aquaculture lease existed prior to the new use. By allowing for the consideration of new uses the proposed law gives a blank check to any aquaculture opponents to intentionally create "new uses" to block the conversion of the lease to a standard lease.

Maine has a long tradition of producing high quality, healthy seafood. Maine seafood is an iconic part of the Maine brand and Maine aquaculture products have earned their place as part of that brand. We grow our products directly in the environment and rely on clean water and healthy marine ecosystems to ensure the health and welfare of our fish, shellfish and sea vegetables. Over the last 47 years MAA has lobbied over a thousand hours to protect water quality and our environment. We have done that because it is the right thing to do but also because our businesses rely on a clean and healthy environment. Please help us continue to build the Maine brand and defend Maines working waterfronts. Vote "OUGHT TO PASS AS AMENDED" on LD 2065. I thank you for your attention and patience and would be glad to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "S. Belle", written in black ink.

Sebastian M. Belle
Executive Director