



**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 2064 "An Act to Amend the Laws Regarding Certain Advisory Councils and Boards Related to the Department of Marine Resources."

LD 2064 increases the maximum number of Aquaculture Advisory Council members and broadens the membership of the Council to include two members of the public "with expertise to the work of the council". MAA SUPPORTS that change as long as those members of the public have the appropriate technical knowledge to be constructive members of the council. LD 2064 makes a number of other changes to the Aquaculture Advisory Council with respect to its authority and responsibilities. MAA SUPPORTS those changes.

MAA does have one concern about the bill. LD 2064 makes the chair of the Departments Aquaculture Advisory Committee an automatic Ex-Officio (non voting) member of the Departments Marine Resources Advisory Council. Appropriately, that is the same as the Departments other specialized advisory councils such as the Lobster, Sea Urchin and Shellfish advisory councils. Unfortunately, in the same section (Sec. 1. 12 MRSA §6024, sub-§1-A) LD 2064 also strikes language that guarantees aquaculture a VOTING member on the Departments Marine Resources Advisory Council. Depending on who is the commissioner and/or the governor, by striking "...and one person representing the aquaculture industry." The aquaculture sector may or may not have a voting member on the DMR Advisory Council. This is the only Advisory Council that has the authority to review and vote on proposed rule changes. MAA OPPOSES this change and asks that the following language be KEPT in the statute. "...and one person representing the aquaculture industry. The Governor shall select the person to represent the aquaculture industry from among

names recommended by the aquaculture industry.” By retaining that language, you will ensure that the aquaculture sector always has a voice and vote on the Departments Advisory Council.

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 2064. 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