

Testimony of Several Business Owners, Non-Profits, and Community Members

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources

Neither For Nor Against LD 2064

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

Senator Reny, Representative Hepler, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on L.D. 2064, *An Act to Amend the Laws Regarding Certain Advisory Councils and Boards Related to the Department of Marine Resources*. We are a group of aquaculture business owners, non-profits, and community members interested in advancing equitable, inclusive, and transparent decision-making around aquaculture in Maine. We are testifying neither for nor against the bill and offer some specific suggestions for amendments below.

We support the intention of this bill to move toward an Aquaculture Advisory Council that is more representative of the diversity of perspectives within the aquaculture industry and interested stakeholders. The Aquaculture Advisory Council provides an important forum for the aquaculture industry to raise issues and ideas with DMR. Adding additional seats, ensuring that those seats are representative across geography and sectors, and setting term limits are all important steps to make the council more representative and inclusive.

In its current composition, the entire Council is made up of members of the Maine Aquaculture Association (MAA) Board. While MAA represents many members of the aquaculture industry, there are many others who are not MAA members that do not have a voice on this Council. There is a need for fresh perspectives and greater representation from a diverse cross-section of the aquaculture industry, and other aquaculture stakeholders (e.g., municipalities, public, scientists), and this bill takes important steps in that direction.

To ensure that these diverse perspectives are represented, we have a few suggestions to the proposed language under Section 1 of the bill focused on appointments and composition of the council.

First, we suggest that the council should be required to have 7 seats (rather than requiring 5, with an optional additional 2 seats), and that two of those seats should be members of the public with expertise in matters related to the work of the council. All the other advisory councils to DMR have 7 or more members in statute, with most advisory councils made up of 13-14 members. Given the growing scope and scale of aquaculture in Maine, the diversity of businesses it represents, and the relevance to a range of stakeholders across the coast, having at least 7 members will bring this council more in line with the other advisory councils, and will allow it to be more representative.

We also suggest adding language for the commissioner to ensure representation of members of the aquaculture industry operating at multiple scales, in addition to representation across geography and sector. Businesses operating at smaller scales face unique challenges and would offer important perspectives to the Council. According to data from DMR, as of mid-2023, 54% of leaseholders operated on less than 5 acres total, and 266 individuals operated solely on limited-purpose aquaculture

permits (LPAs). Ensuring scale representation would give more of a voice to the majority of aquaculture industry participants operating at a smaller scale.

Finally, we suggest adding language that the request for nominations to the Council be published through the DMR .gov delivery service to ensure that the public has the opportunity to provide nominations for new members.

We urge you to consider making these amendments to L.D. 2064 to ensure greater equity, inclusion, and transparency on the Aquaculture Advisory Council. Thank you for considering our comments.

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