



New England Fishermen's Stewardship Association
500 Southborough Dr. Suite 204
South Portland, ME 04106

March 6, 2025

Dear Members of the Maine Marine Resources Committee,

On behalf of the New England Fishermen's Stewardship Association (NEFSA), I am writing to express our strong opposition to LD 336, An Act to Change the Waiting List System for Commercial Lobster and Crab Fishing Licenses. NEFSA represents hundreds of lobstermen across the State of Maine, advocating for policies that sustain our industry, protect our hardworking fishermen, and ensure the responsible stewardship of our marine resources. Our mission is to uphold the integrity and long-term viability of Maine's lobster fishery by supporting industry-led management, defending the rights of those who work on the water, and resisting unnecessary regulatory overreach that threatens the foundation of our coastal communities.

The proposed shift to a 1:1 entry/exit ratio for commercial lobster and crab licenses on a coast-wide basis represents a drastic and unwarranted change that would erode the authority and effectiveness of Maine's seven distinct lobster zone councils. These councils were established to ensure that lobster management reflects the unique conditions, traditions, and practices of different regions along Maine's expansive and diverse coastline. Each zone operates under distinct ecological, economic, and operational challenges, requiring tailored strategies to maintain balance and sustainability within the fishery. The proposed legislation disregards these regional nuances, instead imposing a one-size-fits-all licensing system that would strip local fishermen of their long-standing role in governing their own fisheries. By centralizing control and eliminating localized decision-making, LD 336 would undermine a proven, effective system of fisheries management—one that has been instrumental in preserving Maine's lobster fishery as one of the most sustainable and well-managed in the world.

Furthermore, this proposed shift comes at a time when the lobster industry is already facing an unprecedented series of challenges. The looming prospect of gauge size increases and other resilience measures presents significant concerns, as they could impose additional financial and operational burdens on fishermen who are already struggling to adapt to an unpredictable regulatory environment. The impending right whale regulations set to take effect in 2028 bring further uncertainty, with the potential for sweeping restrictions that could severely impact daily fishing operations. Additionally, the potential for new tariffs on lobster exports threatens to destabilize our markets, drive down boat prices, and place further economic strain on our fishing communities. With so many complex and pressing issues already weighing heavily on Maine's lobstermen, the last thing our industry needs is a rigid, top-down licensing mandate that disregards the voices of those who know the fishery best.

It is also critical to consider the changing demographics of Maine's lobstering fleet. In the past year alone, an estimated 400 fishermen gave up their licenses, choosing to exit the fishery altogether. This exodus is not an isolated event but rather part of a broader trend, as Maine's fleet continues to age and shrink. In the coming years, we can expect a significant number of additional fishermen to retire, leaving a natural opening for new entrants. A rigid 1:1 entry/exit system fails to account for this reality and could unnecessarily stifle opportunity for younger generations, discouraging the very succession that is essential to the industry's long-term health. The current zone-based approach allows for more adaptive, localized decision-making, ensuring that entry into the fishery aligns with regional needs rather than an arbitrary statewide quota.

For generations, Maine's lobster industry has been a model of successful, sustainable fisheries management—a testament to the deep commitment, experience, and stewardship of our fishermen. The zone council system has played a critical role in maintaining this balance, ensuring that local expertise guides regulatory decisions rather than distant, broad-stroke policies that fail to account for the distinct realities of each fishing zone. Preserving this system is essential to maintaining the health of our fishery, the strength of our coastal economies, and the livelihoods of the countless families who depend on lobstering.

For these reasons, NEFSA strongly urges the committee to reject LD 336 and uphold the authority of the lobster zone councils, which remain the best mechanism for ensuring responsible, community-driven fisheries management. We must remain steadfast in protecting the industry-led approach that has sustained Maine's lobster fishery for generations and reject proposals that would strip fishermen of their right to self-governance.

Thank you for your time, attention, and thoughtful consideration of this critical issue. We appreciate your commitment to policies that support Maine's hardworking lobstermen and safeguard the future of this iconic industry.

Sincerely,

Dustin W. Delano
Chief Operating Officer
New England Fishermen's Stewardship Association