



MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

2 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002
(207) 287-1440
TTY: (207) 287-4469

March 6, 2025 - Testimony in support of LD 553:

An Act to Assert State Sovereignty over Ocean Waters and Marine Resources up to 12 Nautical Miles off the State's Coast

Good morning, Senator Tepler, Representative Hepler, and members of the Committee on Marine Resources. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Representative Billy Bob Faulkingham, and I serve as the House Republican Leader. I represent House District 12, which includes the towns of Franklin, Gouldsboro, Hancock, Sorrento, Sullivan, Winter Harbor, and Steuben.

I am here today to express my strong support *for LD 553 – “An Act to Assert State Sovereignty over Ocean Waters and Marine Resources up to 12 Nautical Miles off the State’s Coast.”* This bill asserts Maine’s sovereignty over its territorial waters out to 12 miles, a critical step for the future of our coastal communities and fishing industries. I bring a unique perspective to this issue, having experienced firsthand the regulatory shifts that have increasingly restricted Maine fishermen’s access to waters that we have traditionally fished for generations.

As a young fisherman, I vividly recall attending a meeting in Steuben when changes to federal waters were first being discussed. At that time, fishing in federal waters required nothing more than a notation on a Maine lobster license, which I held with the “EEZ” designation. But during that meeting, we were told that new regulations were coming, including the imposition of additional safety equipment requirements like life rafts. As a young fisherman working from a modest 21-foot Repco, I decided not to check the box to retain my federal permit, not fully understanding the long-term consequences of that decision. Years later, those federal permits were selling for \$10,000 each, and new access to those waters had been effectively closed off.

Prior to those federal changes, Maine fishermen could freely fish beyond the three-mile line without restriction. This boundary wasn’t even a recognized limit for state waters. It wasn’t until the mid-1990s that the three-mile line became a hard limit, which blocked us from fishing the waters we had always relied on, unless we held a federal permit. This shift cost Maine fishermen thousands of square miles of prime fishing grounds.

Today, there are about 1,000 Maine fishermen who hold federal permits and can still access these waters—I am one of them. However, I recognize that opening these waters to all 5,000 of Maine’s fishermen may not be the most practical solution. That said, I firmly believe it is in Maine’s best interest to reclaim sovereignty over these waters and manage them ourselves. The federal government has repeatedly failed in its management of these waters, inhibiting Maine from opening or better regulating fisheries, as well as ensuring fair access for our fishermen. While the Maine Marine Patrol already enforces regulations in these waters under federal deputation, they lack the authority to regulate vessels from other states, placing Maine fishermen at a disadvantage.

These waters hold an abundance of valuable marine resources, including halibut, but the federal government severely restricts our ability to harvest them. The current rule—a one-fish-per-day limit for those with a multi-species license—has proven to be unworkable. With control over these waters, Maine could develop a thriving halibut fishery in the northeast, as well as rebuild a sustainable groundfish fishery. Unfortunately, because the federal government controls these waters, the fisheries have been decimated. The shrimp fishery is gone, the groundfish fishery is in serious decline, and the halibut fishery is nearly non-existent. Worse still, the federal government does not require other states to follow the same conservation rules that Maine fishermen are held to.

Maine has a long and successful history of responsible, sustainable fisheries management. Time and again, we have demonstrated that we can regulate our own fisheries more effectively than the federal government. Reclaiming control over our territorial waters would allow us to rebuild and sustain fisheries that are vital to the economy of our coastal communities and the long-term health of our marine resources.

For all these reasons, I strongly support this bill and urge the committee to consider the long-term benefits of asserting Maine's sovereignty over these waters. Thank you for your time, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Billy Bob Faulkingham".

Rep. Billy Bob Faulkingham
House Republican Leader