

**TESTIMONY OF
Deirdre Gilbert
Department of Marine Resources**

**The Department of Marine Resources (DMR) is testifying
In Opposition to
LD 851 An Act to Establish a Senior Retiree Lobster License
Before the Committee on Marine Resources
Sponsored by Representative Foley
Date of Hearing: March 20, 2025**

Senator Tepler, Representative Hepler, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources, my name is Deirdre Gilbert, Director of State Marine Policy for the Department of Marine Resources, and I am testifying on behalf of the Department in opposition to LD 851.

LD 851 would establish a senior retiree lobster and crab fishing license. Such a license would be available only to persons 65 years of age or older who previously held a Class I, II, or III lobster and crab fishing license for at least 3 consecutive years and who have been a Maine resident for at least 10 years. These license holders would be limited to no more than 100 traps, and would only be authorized to fish from May to December.

As you have already heard this session, access to lobster fishing licenses is an ongoing topic of discussion and concern. Lobster is a limited entry fishery, and new entrants must complete the apprenticeship program in order to become eligible for a license. If an individual does not complete the apprenticeship program and meet certain other requirements before reaching the age of 23, then upon completion of the apprenticeship program, they are placed on the waiting list for the Zone in which they apprenticed. New entry is allowed in accordance with the exit ratios established by the Zone Councils. Currently there are 91 individuals on the seven Zone Council waiting lists, some of whom have been waiting as long as 15 years.

Upon reaching the age of 70, an individual who has completed the apprenticeship program becomes automatically eligible for a lobster license and no longer subject to the waiting list. This proposed bill would not require former license holders to have completed the apprenticeship program to re-enter the fishery. The Department's primary concern with the proposed legislation is that there is no way to estimate or account for the new entry that would result, even at a reduced trap limit of 100 traps. For context, in the last 10 years, there have been nearly 1600 commercial lobster and crab fishing licenses not renewed.

Any proposals for new access to this fishery should be considered in light of the specific circumstances the lobster fishery is facing. The overall catch from the lobster fishery has declined 35% from its peak in 2016, and the management trigger developed at ASMFC that was designed to protect the resilience of the stock was tripped in 2023, although the proposed management response (an increase in the minimum gauge) was not implemented due to the industry's objections. DMR is currently conducting

a round of Zone Council meetings to solicit input on alternative approaches to enhance the biological and economic resiliency of the fishery.

In addition, as a result of the still pending federal regulations for the protection of the North Atlantic Right Whale, Maine is likely to face additional management measures to achieve the required risk reduction. In the past, the Take Reduction Team discussed a 400 trap limit for Maine. While that was delayed by the 6-year pause obtained through the Omnibus bill, it remains a very strong likelihood that reduced trap limits will remain a potential management measure coming in 2028. For this reason, DMR is concerned with any proposals that would increase the amount of gear in the fishery.

Thank you for your consideration, and I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.