

Testimony in Support of
L.D. 971 "An Act To Repeal the Law Regarding Checking Baitfish Traps"

March 23, 2025

To: Senator Joe Baldacci, Chair
Representative Tiffany Roberts, Chair
Distinguished Members of The Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and
Wildlife

From: Darin Hammond

The requirement to check Bait traps every seven days leads to many problems for commercial wholesale bait dealers.

This law is absolutely impossible to comply with and is a safety concern for bait trappers.

A few years ago I was tending my traps in November, by boat, breaking ice, and the local warden was standing on the bank with my wife who was there to make sure I was still above the water. The warden told her you know that if he goes in there is nothing we could do to help him. He will scratch at the ice until his fingernails are gone, and then he will drown or die of hypothermia, and we will be retrieving his body. The warden left, and said he couldn't watch it anymore. I was tending my traps to comply with the law we are talking about today.

As the ice is forming I can tend my traps in open water, and also when there is an inch of ice by boat, but the time between ice in, and when you can safely walk on the ice sometimes is as much as three weeks.

The department says ice is not safe until it is 4 inches thick, but this law requires bait dealers to be on the ice or open water to tend their traps every seven days. Sometimes the wind blows in November, and it is not safe to be on the water in a boat tending traps. When the ice is thick enough to walk on, I tend my traps, but there are other people that trap around me that do not feel comfortable tending their gear until long after I tend mine, as they are heavier than I am. This leads to the question of when is it safe to tend traps? Sometimes I am in a boat with a motor part of the time and then pushing the boat across the ice with one foot in and one foot out of the boat. We should not feel like we must tend our traps to comply with a law that has no biological reason when the water is 50 degrees or cooler.

I can catch fish and store them in the same body of water in a holding box, and they are fine for months. I don't have to check my holding boxes weekly. As a matter of fact, I do not have to check them at all.

During the winter there are times that tending traps leads to dead bait. If it is too cold, like -30 the fish stick to the traps almost immediately, and die quickly, this is a waste of the resource. It is also not safe to be trapping in these conditions. Bait trappers are in the elements, we don't have shelters, heaters, and we have to sort the bait on the ice.

There are also other weather-related safety concerns. If there is rain there can be holes, and heaven forbid it snows, and covers them up so you can't see them.

I tend my traps on the weekends as I work during the week. If I tend a pond on a Saturday, and there is a snowstorm the following Saturday I sometimes tend traps closer to home. It may be 8 or nine days before I can tend them.

This law leaves no room for breakdowns, weather conditions, Slush so you can't get there, sickness, unsafe ice conditions, not enough ice, etc. We are working sometimes in a frozen hell where everything goes wrong, and although we want to tend our traps sometimes it just doesn't happen. Not because we don't want to, but because trapping bait is hard.

We set our traps to catch bait so the people of Maine can ice fish. We should be able to do it safely and should not be penalized by a law that has no biological reasoning when water temperatures are below 50 degrees Fahrenheit.

I urge this committee to vote Ought to pass on this legislation or amend it to lengthen the time period to 21 days from November 1st to April 1st. Doing nothing is putting lives at risk.

Sincerely,

Darin Hammond