

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

**The Department of Marine Resources (DMR) is testifying
In Support of
LD 1176 An Act to Provide for the Sustainable Management of Marine Resources and Create a
Noncommercial Northern Shrimp License
Before the Committee on Marine Resources
Sponsored by Representative Eaton
Date of Hearing: April 3, 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 DMR and I am testifying on behalf of the Department in support of LD 1176. This is a Department bill, and we are grateful to Representative Eaton for sponsoring this bill on our behalf.

LD 1176 seeks to amend an existing law that pertains to the management of “emerging fisheries” which was first adopted in 1999. That law was created to provide a mechanism for DMR to limit commercial access to emerging fisheries through the use of “endorsements” on the commercial fishing license. The purpose of the endorsement is to provide the Department time to collect information on the biological status of the resource, its long-term sustainability, the impact of harvesting on other fisheries, and the Department’s ability to enforce and administer a management program for the emerging fishery. The goal of limiting access through endorsements is to ensure that emerging fisheries do not develop at a rate that is not sustainable on a long-term basis.

Implementing an endorsement requirement requires the advice and consent of the DMR Advisory Council. Endorsements may be required for only three years, renewable for one 3-year extension. Within 24 months of the issuance of the first endorsement, the commissioner is required to report back to this Committee on the status of the emerging fishery, management goals and objectives, and control of access to the emerging fishery.

In recent years, there has been increasing interest in the creation of new harvest opportunities resulting from changing ocean conditions which have made certain species more available in Maine waters than has historically been the case. A good example of this is black sea bass, which is jointly managed by the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. Historically, the majority of the commercial black sea bass fishery has occurred off of New York and New Jersey. Black sea bass is a quota managed fishery, and Maine has a very small allocation of quota (19,050 lbs in 2025). Because anyone with a pelagic and anadromous license can fish for, take, possess and sell black sea bass, the current regulation limits the daily take to no more than 50 lbs.

DMR has been approached by such groups as the Maine Coast Fishermen’s Association and Manomet about the potential to develop a more robust commercial opportunity for black sea bass for Maine

fishermen. However, due to the need to remain within the quota, the only way to proceed is to limit the number of individuals who could initially participate. Under the current law, the ability to require endorsements is limited to species that are harvested under the commercial fishing license. This bill would expand the application of the emerging fisheries law to include species that are harvested under the pelagic and anadromous fishing license. It would also clarify that this tool can be used not just when a fishery or habitat is under increasing fishing pressure but also when a resource is becoming established in Maine waters and access must be limited to provide for its sustainable management. While black sea bass is the current fishery of interest, it is possible that squid could also be a candidate for future consideration.

This bill also makes changes to the statutory framework for licensing the harvest of northern shrimp. Specifically, it removes an existing exemption from having to hold a license to harvest shrimp for personal use. Under current law, if the moratorium on fishing for northern shrimp were lifted, anyone would be able to harvest up to a tote of shrimp per day without having to hold a license. This bill would remove that exemption and create a new noncommercial northern shrimp license at a cost of \$20. This license would only be available for purchase when a fishery is authorized to occur. There is consistent interest in the potential for a future fishery for shrimp, but one of the current impediments is the opportunity for unlimited unlicensed take of shrimp for personal use. For a fishery to occur, all participants would need to be licensed and all landings accounted for, to ensure that the fishery remained within the available quota. While the recent experience with the survey would suggest that there is not currently an available biomass to support either a commercial or noncommercial fishery, the Department still feels this change is a worthwhile housekeeping measure.

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