



**Testimony against
LD 1596 An Act to Support Maine's Sea Farmers
April 24, 2025**

Greetings Senator Tepler, Representative Hepler, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources. On behalf of Protect Maine's Fishing Heritage Foundation, I would like to submit testimony in opposition to LD 1596 *An Act to Support Maine's Sea Farmers*.

My name is Bailey Bowden and I live in Penobscot, Maine. I am here today as a consultant for Protect Maine's Fishing Heritage Foundation, an organization that fully supports small scale and properly sited aquaculture operations.

Protect Maine's Fishing Heritage Foundation has two main concerns with this bill.

First, allowing a lease applicant to hire a non-state approved company to provide video evidence of a dive survey is unacceptable. This video evidence could be the determining factor for lease approval and ideally would be conducted by the Department. To ensure that the proposed lease will not negatively impact the existing environment, the Department must determine that any third party hired to collect evidence be unbiased and follow strict protocols.

Second, as proposed, the Commissioner will only be allowed to consider navigation and environmental effects with a gear modification. The current statute regarding the rule making process states: **Title 12 Chapter 605 Section 6072 13.G: Authorization to add species or gear must be consistent with the findings made under subsection 7-A when the lease was approved.** **Subsection 7-A** requires there be no unreasonable impact on ingress or egress, navigation, fishing, significant marine or wildlife habitat, public use or enjoyment within 1000 feet of a beach or park, no noise or light or negative visual impacts, and an available source of organisms.

LD 1596 would allow a leaseholder to convert a kelp farm into a net pen fish farm and the Commissioner would not be able to consider the effects this operation might have regarding the criteria listed under 7-A.

In closing, LD 1596 will reduce the Department's ability to enforce regulations that are designed to protect the environment and reduce user conflicts.

We respectfully request a vote of ought not to pass on LD 1596.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this bill.