



12:52

The Honorable Denise Tepler, Senate Chair
The Honorable Allison Hepler, House Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources
State House, Room 202
Augusta, ME. 04333

Senator Tepler, Representative Hepler, Honorable members of the Joint Committee on Marine Resources:

My name is Sebastian Belle and I am the Executive Director of the Maine Aquaculture Association (MAA). I stand before you today to testify in strong support of LD 1595 "An Act to Strengthen Working Waterfronts Against Nuisance Complaints Regarding Aquaculture". Although I come before this committee often and you know who I represent I want to start by sharing a few things about me you may not know. In the 70's I fished offshore witnessing first hand the Russian and Polish "wolf packs" "mowing the lawn" and destroying our groundfish populations. I am a founding member of the Working Waterfront Coalition the first of it's kind in the country. I have sat on the boards of directors for the Maine Aquaculture innovation Center and the Maine Fishermans Forum for over twenty years. I am a trustee of the Island Institute and a member of the agriculture council of maine and the Board of Agriculture at the University of Maine. I sat for 18 years on the standard oversight committees for two of the large seafood certification programs and have been appointed to two federal advisory committees. In addition, I was a member of the EPA Aquaculture Effluents task force and the National Organic Standards Board aquaculture task force. I spent a brief period as a policy analyst for the DMR and for five years worked to develop conservation methods for Bluefin Tuna at the New England Aquarium. And yes for a number of years I was one of those "evil" fish farmers that I am sure you will hear more about today. I have farmed Salmon, Halibut, Seabass, Tuna, Scallops, and oysters and worked my entire career to develop ways to make a living on the water and protect the aquatic ecosystems that we as aquaculturalists and commercial fishermen depend so much on. I tell you all this so that you understand that working waterfronts and marine conservation have been part of my life since I was a kid.

For those of you who have known me as an advocate for working waterfronts and aquaculture you have most often seen me fighting to defend our sector against legislation designed to make it more and more difficult to conduct aquaculture. Often that legislation has been backed by wealthy landowners who don't want to hear, see or smell commercial working waterfronts by their houses on Maines beautiful coastline. Other times the legislation may have been backed by extremist environmental groups whose very business model is based on polarizing issues and prolonging debate so that they can fundraise around the controversy that they themselves often create. During this legislative session you may have noticed a change in how we as an organization engage. Instead of just being in a defensive mode we have started to support legislation designed to solve problems that our members encounter and are frustrated by. That change in posture comes directly from our members who are frankly fed up with being treated like second class

citizens. Aquaculture is no longer willing to be treated like the red headed stepchild of Maines working waterfronts. We are a legitimate and growing part of Maine's coastal communities and we deserve to be treated fairly and equally with our fellow working waterfront citizens. LD 1595 is about fairness and equity it is not about avoiding responsibilities or establishing loopholes as I am sure some of those who will oppose it will suggest. If a farmer breaks the law LD 1595 will not shield them. If a farmer violates the Clean Water Act, Marine Mammal Protection Act, Migratory Bird Act, Endangered Species Act or any of the 23 other state and federal acts that apply to aquaculture LD 1595 will not protect them. Finally LD 1595 will not prevent any citizen of the United States of America filing a citizen lawsuit under those acts that allow for those actions.

All that LD 1595 does do is give aquaculturalists similar protection against frivolous nuisance lawsuits as commercial fishermen, and land farmers already have. Why shouldn't an oyster packing house have the same protection as Lukes lobster or Cozy Harbor Seafood? Why shouldn't a salmon farmer who takes their nets ashore to dry them out and clean and repair them have the same protection that a lobsterman who stacks his pots onshore at the end of the season has from a neighbor who doesn't like how the gear smells as it dries out? Why shouldn't a mussel farmer who brings their dropper lines ashore to clean and repair them have the same protection that a draggerman has when they bring their nets ashore to repair or rerig them?

LD 1595 is about equality and fairness and I ask that you vote **Ought to Pass** on LD 1595.

Thank you for your attention, I would be glad to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'S. Belle', written in a cursive style.

Sebastian M. Belle
Executive Director

SUSTAINED SUPPORT FOR MAINE AQUACULTURE

A statewide public survey revealed **strong and broad support** for Maine's aquaculture sector

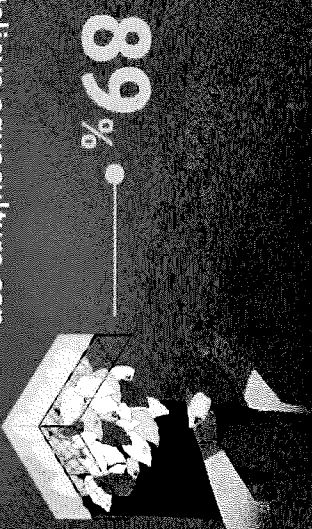
High level of support for aquaculture has held steady since 2020



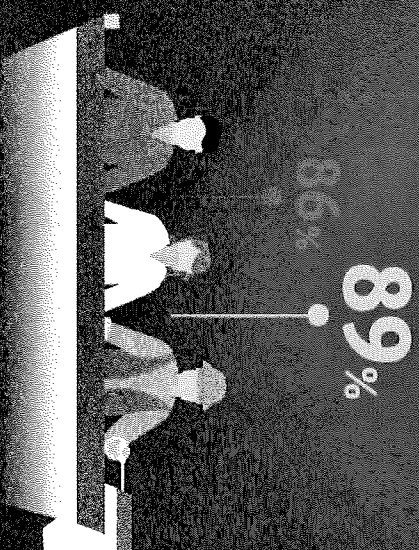
Eight out of ten
Mainers familiar with
aquaculture support
its growth within
the state

Economic Contribution

Believe aquaculture can
play a role in strengthening
Maine's working waterfronts



Believe aquaculture can play a role
in **diversifying** Maine's coastal and
rural **economies**



Aquaculture Products

Believe aquaculture products are
**sustainable and
environmentally
responsible**



Believe Maine aquaculture is an **important
and valuable part of the local food system**



**Mainers knowledgeable
about aquaculture show high
support, highlighting the value
of education in shaping
positive views**

☐ All Mainers

☐ Mainers familiar with aquaculture