

TESTIMONY OF  
Deirdre Gilbert  
Department of Marine Resources

The Department of Marine Resources (DMR) is testifying  
In Support of

LD 1991 An Act to Authorize an Educational Requirement for Seaweed Permit Holders  
Before the Committee on Marine Resources  
Sponsored by Senator Tepler  
Date of Hearing: February 5, 2026

Senator Tepler, Representative Hepler, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources, my name is Deirdre Gilbert, I am Director of State Marine Policy at the Maine Department of Marine Resources, and I am testifying on behalf of the Department in support of LD 1991. This is a Department bill and we are grateful to Senator Tepler for sponsoring this bill on our behalf.

The idea for this bill was brought to the Department by members of the Seaweed Fisheries Advisory Council (SFAC). It would authorize DMR to establish an educational requirement for holders of seaweed harvesting licenses. There is precedence for similar trainings for other licenses, including the following examples:

- Successful completion of a written examination prior to the issuance of a noncommercial lobster and crab fishing license; and
- Successful completion of an educational course annually prior to renewal of a Limited Purpose Aquaculture license; and
- Successful completion of an educational course regarding proper handling of elvers to ensure survivability prior to issue of an elver fishing license.

While not a uniform requirement across all licenses, DMR supports such trainings when there is a specific circumstance in the fishery that would warrant one. Seaweed is unique in Maine's fisheries in that in 2019, the Supreme Judicial Court held that rockweed, a species of seaweed that grows in Maine's intertidal zone, is private property belonging to the adjoining upland landowner who owns the intertidal soil in fee simple and is therefore not public property. For this reason, seaweed harvesters must seek permission from the upland landowner when that individual owns the intertidal or be exposed to the potential of a theft charge, or a civil suit. Completing a state developed training and passing an exam demonstrating understanding of rockweed laws and regulations could give landowners more comfort in granting such permissions when requested.

If approved, DMR would work with the SFAC to develop the materials that a new harvester would need to review and the test that they would need to pass before their license may be issued. Because rockweed is just one of the species of seaweed that could be harvested under the seaweed license, the bill gives the Department the authority to implement a rockweed endorsement, to potentially limit the population of harvesters required to complete the training. Finally, the bill gives the Department the

flexibility to limit implementation of this requirement to those individuals seeking a license for the first time (issuance) as well as renewals.

Again, the Department is bringing this forward at the request of rockweed industry members in the hopes that it provides a benefit that will allow harvesters to continue to participate in this fishery. Thank you for your consideration, and I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.