

February 5, 2002

Senator Tepler, Representative Hepler and members of the Marine Resources Committee:

My name is Marianne LaCroix, and I am the executive director of the Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative. I am speaking in support of L.D.2002.

The Collaborative is charged with promoting Maine Lobster and identifying market areas that provide the greatest return on investment for the industry. We focus on increasing demand for Maine Lobster in the United States and protecting the brand reputation of the product and the fishery. We bring together the voices of hundreds of local fishermen, dealers and processors to provide one powerful voice for the industry.

Over the past five years, the Collaborative has shared Maine Lobster's unique story and rich heritage with over 17 billion consumers through our marketing campaigns. Maine Lobster is searched on Google over 7 times as much as Alaskan King Crab and over 52 times as much as Chilean Sea Bass. We have driven over 500,000 consumers and wholesale buyers to our online purchasing database. We have promoted the premium nature of Maine Lobster, with "Maine" commanding on average a 17% price premium over generic lobster on menus. Maine Lobster appears on 8.2% more menus than it did five years ago.

The Collaborative also works to protect the brand reputation of Maine Lobster and stabilize demand during moments of volatility. In 2022, Maine Lobster lost two sustainability certifications in quick succession because of a legal technicality around right whales, and Whole Foods announced that they would no longer carry Maine Lobster as a result. Since many large wholesale buyers rely on sustainability certifications, there was widespread concern among dealers that other customers would drop the product. The Collaborative anticipated this issue and responded immediately with a comprehensive campaign to reassure buyers that the fishery had long been committed to the preservation of right whales. We used digital advertising to share the dedicated website and videos we had created. We provided dealers with fact sheets to educate their customers and held two webinars to allow wholesale buyers to hear directly from industry experts on the issue. No other large buyers dropped Maine Lobster.

The Maine Lobster industry will continue to face reputational threats moving forward. The Collaborative's role is to ensure that buyers maintain confidence in the Maine Lobster brand. Tactics include media training for industry spokespeople, message development, evaluating consumer sentiment, developing and distributing educational content and providing balanced media coverage.

This year, the Collaborative will evaluate the marketing strategy and tactical direction to ensure that the program is as efficient and effective as possible moving forward. We will continue to work to increase demand for Maine Lobster through a creative public relations campaign, innovative social media outreach and targeted digital advertising.

Maine Lobster is competing in a marketplace where branded and commodity products are vying for attention. The Collaborative provides broad marketing support for the Maine Lobster brand and for the thousands of fishermen and hundreds of dealers and processors that rely on Maine Lobster.