



New England Fishermen's Stewardship Association

500 Southborough Dr. Suite 204

South Portland, ME 04106

February 5, 2026

**Re: LD 2002 – An Act to Extend the Sunset Date of the Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative (MLMC)**

Senator Tepler, Representative Hepler, and Members of the Marine Resources Committee,

On behalf of the New England Fishermen's Stewardship Association (NEFSA), thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on LD 2002 and the proposed reauthorization of the Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative (MLMC). NEFSA represents working waterfront stakeholders across New England, with Maine lobstermen comprising a significant portion of our membership. Our comments reflect extensive, direct feedback from harvesters who fund and depend on this program.

The 2025 lobster season has been marked by tighter margins and heightened uncertainty. Despite lower landings, lobstermen experienced lower dockside prices rather than the price improvement typically expected under basic supply-and-demand dynamics. At the same time, operating costs—including bait, gear, fuel, and maintenance—have remained elevated. This combination has created an unsustainable economic environment for many fishing families and raises serious concerns about market functionality and long-term stability.

NEFSA recognizes the value of the MLMC's mission and acknowledges that the Collaborative has played a constructive role in public-facing efforts, including addressing reputational and public relations challenges such as right whale concerns. These efforts have helped protect the industry's image during a period of intense scrutiny. However, given current economic conditions and the concerns expressed by lobstermen, accountability, transparency, and measurable return on investment must be strengthened.

Following extensive discussion at the Lobster Advisory Council, a 5–4 vote resulted in a recommendation to reauthorize the MLMC for one year only—a position NEFSA supports. A one-year reauthorization would maintain continuity while creating a clear checkpoint for evaluation. During this period, NEFSA strongly encourages a structured survey of lobstermen to gather direct input on the future of the Collaborative, its priorities, and whether it is delivering value to those who fund approximately 75 percent of its budget.

NEFSA also urges the Committee to consider the broader regulatory landscape facing the fishery. The industry is confronting growing resiliency challenges associated with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) stock assessment results, and the likelihood of additional regulatory measures remains uncertain. In anticipation of these pressures, NEFSA

recommends allocating \$500,000 annually in both 2026 and 2027 for the purchase, v-notching, and release of female lobsters. This proactive investment would support stock enhancement, strengthen resiliency, and help position the fishery ahead of future regulatory actions, while delivering tangible conservation benefits that directly support the resource and the working waterfront economy.

To further strengthen the MLMC's effectiveness and credibility, NEFSA encourages increased direct engagement with lobstermen, including regular communication forums—not solely dealer-focused discussions—to ensure real-world conditions on the water are informing program priorities. Greater transparency around market dynamics, including the persistent price gap between Maine and Canadian boat prices, would also help rebuild trust and reduce strain within the supply chain.

NEFSA appreciates the Committee's attention to these concerns. We are testifying neither for nor against LD 2002, but respectfully recommend a path forward that includes a one-year reauthorization, meaningful industry engagement, proactive investment in stock resiliency for 2026 and 2027, and a renewed focus on delivering measurable value to the lobstermen funding the Collaborative.

Thank you for your time, your service, and your continued commitment to Maine's lobster industry and coastal communities.

Respectfully submitted,

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New England Fishermen's Stewardship Association