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Testimony of Rep. Allison Hepler presenting
**LD 2013, An Act to Authorize the Commissioner of Marine
Resources to Adopt Emergency Rules to Protect Certain Marine
Mammals in Exceptional Circumstances**
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources

Good afternoon, Senator Tepler and colleagues of the Marine Resources Committee. I am Allison Hepler and I represent the towns of Arrowsic, Georgetown, Phippsburg, West Bath and Woolwich. I am pleased to introduce **LD 2013, An Act to Authorize the Commissioner of Marine Resources to Adopt Emergency Rules to Protect Certain Marine Mammals in Exceptional Circumstances**.

Many of us recall that just over a year ago, nearly 100 endangered North Atlantic Right Whales gathered in and around Jeffrey's Ledge for a couple of weeks. Lobster fishing is heavy in Jeffrey's Ledge in the winter months, and emergency efforts to reduce entanglements came down to fishermen's voluntary efforts to reduce endlines or to delay moving gear to that area. The Department of Marine Resources' (DMR) regulatory authority to enact emergency rules to avoid this situation was limited to emergency meetings with fishermen and providing real time information regarding whale sightings.

With the ending of the six-year pause on new federal whale regulations coming up quickly, the industry and the Department need to pay close attention to reducing interactions between right whales and lobster gear. LD 2013 would provide a key tool for DMR, the ability to enact dynamic management measures and reduce closures and closure times when there are potential encounters between right whales and lobster gear.

DMR has been talking with Lobster Zone Councils over the past year about this bill, and I was able to attend a couple of those meetings and hear the discussions. There was general support for dynamic management. Dynamic management not only provides DMR some measure of validation when engaging in negotiations with the federal government, it also keeps DMR accountable to the Maine lobster industry. Finally, the bill requires a report back to this committee.

There is much to discuss regarding this department bill, and with that, I ask that you direct questions to the experts following me. Thank you!