

Growing Maine's Blue Economy

Promoting sectors in Maine with global potential for growth



What is the blue economy?

Maine's **blue economy** means a sustainable and equitable ocean economy that optimizes innovation to expand economic opportunities in our coastal communities and to solve pressing societal needs. It is grounded in Maine's unique marine heritage, research expertise, and location.

Sectors with Growth Potential...

- Aquaculture
- Marine biotechnology
- Ocean data & research
- Coastal infrastructure
- Sustainable boatbuilding

Early Momentum...

- Blue Biotech Innovation Studio & Summit launching
- Seafood supply chain & processing improvements underway
- Research institutions, businesses, & investors collaborating

Challenges...

- Small organizations often work in isolation
- Limited access to growth capital
- Infrastructure constraints
- Workforce shortages

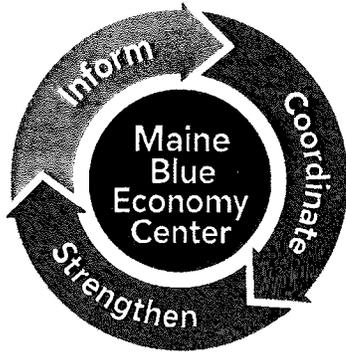
Legislative Action...

- Establish Blue Economy Center within Maine Technology Institute
- Authorize \$50M innovation bond
- Strengthen infrastructure & business support
- Support workforce development

Turning Ocean Assets Into Jobs and Investment for Maine

What is the Maine Blue Economy Center?

A coordinated strategy to grow Maine's ocean economy



A coordination and commercialization hub within Maine Technology Institute (MTI) that aligns strategy, investment, and industry to grow jobs in Maine's ocean economy.

INFORM...

- Map assets and gaps
- Identify high-growth sectors
- Provide policy guidance
- Track measurable outcomes

COORDINATE...

- Align research & industry
- Connect founders to capital
- Reduce fragmentation
- Convene partners statewide

STRENGTHEN...

- Support startup formation
- Speed commercialization
- Attract investment
- Grow year-round jobs

Why Maine Needs It...

- Strong assets but fragmented efforts
- Limited commercialization support
- Growing competition from other states

Housed Within MTI...

- Builds on existing innovation infrastructure
- Modeled after the Life Sciences Center
- Not a new standalone agency

Aligning Strategy, Investment, and Industry to Grow Maine's Blue Economy



Maine Blue Economy

Frequently Asked Questions

Maine's ocean economy plays a significant role in employment and local prosperity across the state. At the same time, current efforts are spread across sectors and regions, which can limit coordination and competitiveness. The proposed Blue Economy Center is intended to provide statewide organization, strategic direction, and shared data to support working waterfronts, small businesses, and long-term economic growth. This FAQ outlines the purpose of the Center, how it would operate, and the potential benefits for Maine's communities.

What is the "blue economy" in Maine?

The blue economy is Maine's ocean economy viewed through a modern lens that emphasizes innovation, sustainability, collaboration, and long-term opportunity. It includes fishing, aquaculture, boatbuilding, marine biotechnology, ocean data, coastal resilience, and maritime infrastructure. Maine's ocean economy contributes nearly \$6.8 billion annually and supports over 90,000 jobs.

Why is the Legislature considering a Blue Economy Center?

Lawmakers asked two consecutive Blue Economy Task Forces to assess whether stronger statewide coordination could help Maine remain competitive in ocean-based industries. The Task Forces found that while Maine has exceptional assets, efforts are fragmented across sectors and regions. The second Task Force outlined what a Center should do, how it could be structured, and what would be required to launch it.

What would a Blue Economy Center do?

The Task Force identified three core functions:

1. **Inform** – Gather and share data, develop tools such as an Ocean Economy Database, and track trends to support decision-making.
2. **Coordinate** – Align state agencies, research institutions, industry, and communities around shared priorities.
3. **Strengthen** – Support capacity-building, help promising opportunities grow into businesses, and attract federal and private investment.

How is this different from what Maine already does?

Maine has strong organizations serving individual sectors such as fishing, aquaculture, research, and economic development. However, no single entity is responsible for coordinating strategy across the full ocean economy. The Center would fill that gap by aligning existing efforts and improving statewide coordination rather than duplicating current work.

What will the Center *not* do?

The Center would be designed with clear limits. It would not:

- Regulate industries or create new regulatory requirements
- Replace or compete with existing organizations
- Directly manage infrastructure or construction projects
- Divert funding from existing working waterfront or industry support programs

Will the Center be a physical facility or an organization?

The Center would be an organization, not a new building. It would begin with a small staff and focus on leadership, strategy, partnership-building, and resource coordination.

How will the Center be governed and held accountable?

The Task Force recommended that the Center operate with clear oversight and accountability. The Center is envisioned as a public-private partnership that brings together state leadership, industry, research institutions, and communities. Governance could include:

- Alignment with an existing state or quasi-state entity such as the Maine Technology Institute.
- Guidance from an advisory board representing industry, research, and communities.
- Regulator reporting on activities, outcomes, and use of resources.

Final governance details will be established through the legislative and implementation process.

How will the Center serve all of Maine?

The Center is designed to benefit the entire state by connecting communities to opportunities, strengthening local capacity, and helping rural, coastal, and inland regions participate in and benefit from ocean-sector growth.

How would the Center support workforce development?

The Center would work with existing education and training providers to help align workforce programs with current and emerging industry needs. By improving coordination across sectors and regions, the Center would help strengthen career pathways, support job retention, and ensure Maine's workforce is prepared for growth in ocean-based industries.

Why is statewide coordination important now?

Other coastal states have adopted coordinated, statewide approaches and are securing significant federal and private investment as a result. Maine has equal or greater strengths, but without similar coordination risks falling behind and missing time-limited funding opportunities.

How does the Center fit within Maine's existing economic development strategy?

The Center would support existing state economic development efforts. It would help align agencies, institutions, and partners around shared priorities and provide coordination capacity that individual programs and organizations are not positioned to offer on their own.

How much would the Center cost?

The Task Force recommends a conservative startup budget of \$500,000 to \$1,000,000 per year for two years. This would support one to two staff positions and early coordination activities, with authority to seek additional outside funding.

How would the Blue Economy Center interact with the new Life Sciences Center?

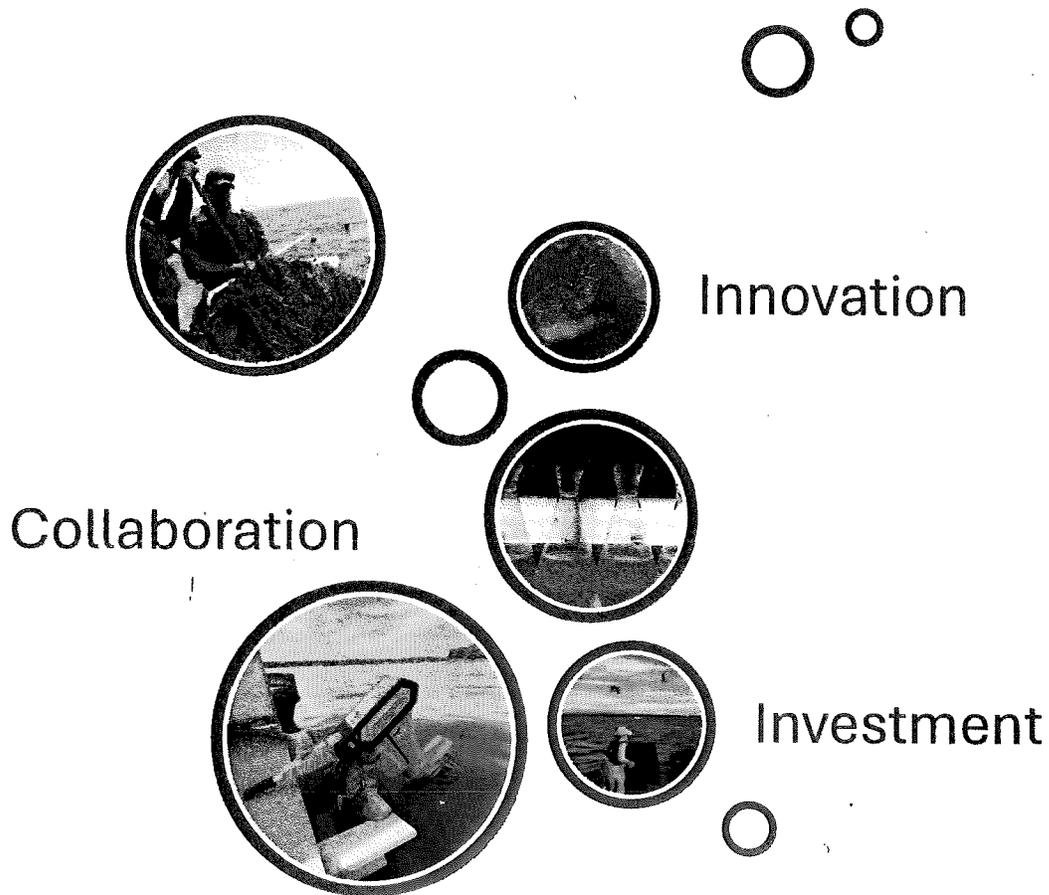
The Centers would be complementary and aligned. Overlapping areas such as marine biotechnology, aquaculture, biobased products, and data science would benefit from collaboration rather than duplication. Coordination would strengthen outcomes for both efforts.

How will success be measured?

Progress would be tracked annually through clear metrics such as jobs supported, investment attracted, partnerships formed, and progress toward statewide economic goals.

What happens if Maine does nothing?

Without improved coordination, Maine risks missing federal and philanthropic funding opportunities, losing talent and startups to other states, and continuing to operate in fragmented ways that limit statewide impact.



MAINE'S BLUE ECONOMY TASK FORCE
A REPORT TO THE MAINE LEGISLATURE
VOLUME 2

DECEMBER 3, 2025

AUGUSTA, MAINE

**DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT**

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Executive Summary

Maine's future is tied to the sea. According to data from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), ocean-related businesses contributed nearly \$6.8 billion to Maine's gross domestic product and employed over 90,000 people. Beyond the economic numbers, the ocean is central to Maine's identity. Our more than 5,000 miles of coastline, including inlets and islands, is longer than that of any other state except Alaska.

From the boats we build to the fish and shellfish we catch to the new ideas emerging from our laboratories and working waterfronts, the ocean shapes how Mainers live and work. Many components of our marine-related economy such as our seafood industry, aquaculture, offshore wind, and others have already been the subjects of carefully considered roadmaps and strategy documents.¹ Yet other sectors that provide jobs, spark innovation, and keep Maine's coastal communities thriving have not yet received this kind of careful consideration. Meanwhile, other states and countries have invested significant resources in understanding and growing these marine economic sectors within their borders. Each jurisdiction defines the bounds of this collective differently, yet they typically share the same name. They are referred to as the "blue economy."

In order to allow Maine to join other states and regions in taking advantage of these opportunities, the Legislature established the first Blue Economy Task Force in 2024. Its first priority was to produce a definition of Maine's blue economy. It also identified five economic sectors or industries with high economic growth potential: aquaculture and marine vegetation, marine biotechnology, ocean data and research, resilient coastal infrastructure, and sustainable boatbuilding and marine propulsion. It did not identify these sectors as replacements or even direct competition for other ocean industries that already have clear strategies and investments in place. Rather the Task Force sought to focus attention on new opportunities that could deliver broad benefits for Maine's people and communities, in many cases while supporting our legacy industries. The first report concluded with a series of recommendations to strengthen coordination and investment across the spectrum of Maine's marine sectors. These

Definition of Maine's blue economy

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For purposes of this definition, the Task Force further defines "sustainable and equitable" to mean practices that support economic growth while maintaining or improving the health of marine ecosystems and without negatively impacting social, environmental, and cultural aspects of the community.

¹ For a full list see Appendix B of "Maine's Blue Economy Task Force: A Report to the Maine Legislature," Michael Conathan Consulting, et al., January 31, 2025. Available at: <https://www.maine.gov/dec/d/business-development/sites/maine.gov.de>.

recommendations are referenced in full in the January 2025 report submitted to the Legislature.²

In June 2025, the Legislature reestablished the Blue Economy Task Force and codified the definition of Maine’s blue economy. This new Task Force, made up of 23 members and more than a dozen additional participants (see Appendix A), was charged with two priorities: **1) develop recommendations for a Maine Center for the Blue Economy;** and **2) recommend improvements to blue economy workforce and training programs.**

The recommendations addressing each of those directives are summarized here and described in greater detail in the subsequent sections of this report. It is important to note that this work—and the foundation established by the first Task Force—moved forward with the understanding that other major ocean sectors were already progressing under pre-existing strategies and institutional processes. As these sectors evolve, the Blue Economy Center could eventually provide a natural venue for added coordination or strategic support. Any future expansion would be guided by the Center’s board, executive director, and stakeholders, and would remain consistent with the goals and priorities in this report.

Recommendations for a Maine Blue Economy Center

The Task Force recommends establishing a Blue Economy Center focused on the three key functions Maine needs most to unlock the full potential of its blue economy – synthesizing data, strengthening coordination, and attracting investment. It also developed recommendations for the Center’s structure, governance, and budget. These recommendations are summarized here and explained in greater detail in the Center Design Considerations section, which includes a table of recommended activities and deliverables, a set of guiding principles, and a suggested implementation framework.

The Center’s Key Functions

1. Synthesize data and highlight emerging trends

The Center should gather, analyze, and share data, including creating an Ocean Economy Database to measure and track key sectors; provide these data through accessible tools such as an online portal; and communicate emerging trends and insights.

2. Coordinate Maine’s blue economy ecosystem

The Center should serve as a navigator for Maine’s blue economy by connecting partners and aligning initiatives in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors; support workforce development efforts; and ensure marine industries outside the five identified sectors remain central to economic decisions.

² Maine’s Blue Economy Task Force: A Report to the Maine Legislature, Michael Conathan Consulting, et al., January 31, 2025. Available at: <https://www.maine.gov/decd/business-development/sites/maine.gov.de>

3. *Support innovation and attract investment*

The Center should position Maine to compete for federal, private, and philanthropic funding; promote the state's blue economy to investors and funders; champion policies and programs that support growth of the blue economy; and represent Maine's leadership nationally and internationally.

The Center's Governance, Structure, and Budget

The Blue Economy Center should be overseen by the Department of Economic and Community Development and launched at the Maine Technology Institute or a comparable quasi-state partner organization. It should receive guidance and support from an Advisory Board consisting of 10-15 members. Members should represent the breadth of Maine's coast and include a diversity of marine industries, with a majority of members working directly for businesses and trade groups in the blue economy.

Given the tight budget landscape for FY2026, the Task Force has offered a conservative funding recommendation. It proposes two years of startup support to cover 1-2 full-time staff members and initial activities (\$500,000 to \$1,000,000 per year). For year three and beyond, the Center should pursue bond funding and external investment, potentially in partnership with other emerging economic development initiatives such as the Life Sciences and Innovation Center.

Recommendations for Improvements to Blue Economy Workforce and Training Programs

The Task Force also produced a set of workforce recommendations that outline the Center's role and identify broader training needs Maine must address to realize its full growth potential.

The Role of the Center

The Center should use its role as a statewide coordinating body to:

- Compile and analyze data on blue economy workforce program participation, outcomes, and funding;
- Identify geographic and sectoral gaps in these programs;
- Facilitate collaboration among education, industry, and government partners;
- Serve as a clearinghouse and promoter for internships, apprenticeships, and cross-disciplinary training;
- Track and align diverse funding sources, including state, federal, and private sector.

Additional Workforce and Training Recommendations

While beyond the scope originally envisioned for the Task Force, the following recommendations would strengthen efforts to build Maine's blue economy workforce.

Conduct Targeted Workforce Analyses

Assess workforce barriers and future needs in two specific sectors that are currently underrepresented in such programs: coastal resilience & infrastructure and shipbuilding & sustainable propulsion.

Expand and Coordinate Existing Efforts

Strengthen outreach and marketing for blue economy programs and career opportunities, particularly among K-12 students, and develop a blue economy education map of existing statewide efforts and a communications strategy.

Develop New Models to Expand the Workforce Pipeline

Collaborate with experienced partner organizations to expand workforce pipelines, including exploring service-based or Corps models.

Improve Funding Sustainability

Support resource development and advocacy to sustain and expand workforce initiatives as industry needs evolve.

Conclusion

Throughout its work, both iterations of the Blue Economy Task Force emphasized that as Maine pursues opportunities to grow its blue economy, it must continue to support the industries that shaped our relationship with the sea. The working waterfronts, businesses, and trades built on hard work, ingenuity, and stewardship of natural resources form the foundation on which a new generation of ocean-based innovation will grow.

The Five Blue Economy Sectors Identified by the First Task Force

These sectors build on the skills, knowledge, and problem-solving that have long defined work along Maine's coast. Short descriptions are provided below; a more detailed economic analysis appears in Appendix D.

Aquaculture & Marine Vegetation

Aquaculture is expected to drive most of the world's future growth in seafood production. Maine has more than 300 licensed sites covering nearly 2,000 acres, and seaweed farming has expanded rapidly—making Maine the nation's leading producer of farmed seaweed. Marine vegetation supports food, pharmaceuticals, fertilizers, biobased materials, and potential carbon-removal solutions. Growth will require progress in product and market development, permitting efficiency, community engagement, processing capacity, and global competitiveness.

Marine Biotechnology

Marine biotechnology develops new health, agricultural, consumer, and industrial products from marine organisms. While some products have longstanding roots in Maine, most activity remains early-stage. Advancing toward Maine-made commercial products will require close coordination across research institutions, startups, aquaculture producers, and the proposed Maine Life Sciences Innovation Center.

Ocean Data & Marine Research

Nearly every ocean industry depends on real-time environmental data. This fast-growing sector—NOAA's "Ocean Enterprise"—includes sensors, buoys, autonomous vehicles, mapping tools, forecasting systems, and data analytics/AI. Maine is already a leader in

ocean science and modeling. Expanding this sector requires strengthening research–industry collaboration, identifying components Maine can scale commercially, and building a skilled workforce.

Resilient Coastal Infrastructure

Rising seas and stronger storms are challenging Maine's coastal roads, utilities, buildings, and working waterfronts. Preparing infrastructure for future conditions also presents economic opportunity. Maine firms are advancing modern construction and modular fabrication, while universities develop new composite materials. Municipalities and conservation organizations are pursuing nature-based solutions such as wetlands, dunes, and oyster reefs to reduce erosion and protect communities.

Sustainable Boatbuilding & Marine Propulsion

Boatbuilding is one of Maine's most iconic industries, grounded in more than 400 years of craftsmanship. The sector is rapidly evolving with composites, digital design tools, and electric or hybrid propulsion. Maine companies are developing electric outboards, high-capacity batteries, and efficient workboats. As global demand shifts toward low-emission vessels, Maine is well positioned to combine its heritage with advanced manufacturing and cutting-edge propulsion technologies.

