



MAINE AQUACULTURE ASSOCIATION

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March 15, 2021

The Honorable Stacy Brenner, Senate Chair
The Honorable Ralph Tucker, House Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
Cross Building, Room 206
Augusta, ME. 04333

Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker, Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources:

My name is Sebastian Belle and I am the Executive Director of the Maine Aquaculture Association. The Maine Aquaculture Association (MAA) represents Maine's aquatic farmers and the many infrastructure companies that provide goods and services to our producers. In an average year, our members generate roughly \$100 million in farm gate sales and directly employ 700 Maine citizens. I stand before you today to testify in support of LD 593, "An Act To Restore Regular Eelgrass Mapping in the State".

The Maine Aquaculture Association and its member growers are deeply committed to the sustainable use and stewardship of Maine's waters. As aquatic farmers, we have a strong vested interest in healthy aquatic ecosystems, high water quality and a clean environment. Healthy eelgrass beds are a critical component of those ecosystems and their accurate mapping is an important resource management tool. Our members are on and literally in the ocean every day. One thing we have learned about eelgrass beds is that they constantly move. Key to their accurate mapping is a continual updating process that includes both removing coordinates for beds that are no longer there as well as adding coordinates for newly established beds. Typically updating exercises tend to focus on adding new beds and ignore the removal of ones that are no longer there. Over time that leads to large areas being identified as "no go zones" because they are shown as eelgrass beds on the various maps. LD593 includes an analysis of the changes to eelgrass beds within the state. MAA strongly supports that bill component and expects that analysis of changes will include recommendations and a policy on how eelgrass bed coordinates are both added and removed from the database and maps.

Maine coastal communities have a long tradition of going to sea both as mariners and to harvest the seafood that grows in our clean waters. Maine's water farmers and their families are helping preserve this heritage of working waterfronts and communities linked to the sea. I ask you to help continue that tradition and request that the mapping project as outlined in LD 593 include a procedure and policy for removal of nonexistent eelgrass beds from the database and maps so that "no go zones" are not created in perpetuity.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'S. Belle', written in a cursive style.

Sebastian M. Belle
Executive Director

SMB/rkc