

Michael Hyde
Trenton
LD 508

Testimony regarding LD 508

Michael Hyde
100 Road Not Taken
Trenton, Maine 04605
Hancock County

A predatory industry, banned in many countries, wants to exploit the pristine waters of coastal Maine. Our state's economic developers are going flat out to bring more industrial scale fish factories here, and our regulators are doing all they can to see that these installations continue to operate with near-complete autonomy. Politicians and lobbyists in Augusta are welcoming these global pariahs with open arms. Ordinary Mainers are fighting to stop them. Its time to rethink our policies, and LD 508 is the first step toward badly-needed change.

Many countries with extensive seafood industries have banned ocean-based finfish farming outright, others are trying to kill them with stiffer regulations and steep taxes. Every state on the west coast of the US has banned sea-based fish factories, as have most of the first nations along the Pacific coast of Canada. British Columbia and Canada's Maritime Provinces are also moving to ban this form of aquaculture.

Outside of Augusta Mainers know that these enormous floating factories pose grave risks for lobstering, other traditional fisheries, and tourism – all multi-billion-dollar drivers of the state's economy. Unelected state officials are luring foreign corporations to build fish factories here with minimal environmental restrictions, cheap financing, and zero taxes. Meanwhile, ordinary Maine people are fighting to stop industrial scale finfish farms both on land and sea.

For instance, Nordic Aquafarm's proposed Belfast operation has just been torpedoed by the state Supreme Court, American Aquafarms' proposed sea-based installation in Frenchman Bay generated massive opposition, and citizen lawsuits have delayed a planned finfish farm in Jonesport. Industrial scale installations in Bucksport and Millinocket are dead or dying in the face of legal challenges from local residents.

How is it that our elected officials and the bureaucrats they appoint are so out of sync with the Maine people on this vital issue? Well, everyone loves to take credit for "job creation" -- even if the jobs aren't particularly good ones. The true costs imposed on the State by this industry go unstated in the rush to claim an economic victory.

In all of North America, which is a multi-billion-dollar market for seafood, there is no better place to raise salmon and many other finfish than the clear, cold waters along the coast of Maine. And no state has less stringent licensing and environmental monitoring requirements than Maine. Even the most inept economic developers could bring foreign seafood conglomerates to Maine! We will see an unprecedented number of finfish farm applications in the coming years, and we are unprepared for the onslaught.

Our aquaculture regulations were last updated 19 years ago. Way back then Maine lawmakers envisioned a new aquacultural cottage industry. They hoped for a proliferation of small mom and pop operators who needed an alternative to fishing and lobstering. So they drafted regulations that would balance environmental protection against economic opportunity.

Today multinational corporations have wiped out small fish farmers in Maine and around the world. Today's fish factories are operating at ever-increasing scale, with single installations that produce millions of pounds of fish per year. Budget pressures have gutted enforcement of the minimal environmental restrictions nominally required by the state. Unrelenting pressure from politicians and lobbyists has allowed corporate interests to capture and control our regulators.

Today capital insiders are pursuing vampire industries and ordinary Mainers are pleading for them to stop.

It's time to take a fresh look at Maine's regulations on finfish factories. Let's pause and consider how we want to deal with the threat they pose to our coastal waters.

Let's devise a new set of regulations that allows aquaculture to thrive, but also preserves our delicate and unique marine resources.
Please enact LD 508.
Thank you!