

Senator Brenner, Representative Gramlich, and esteemed members of the committee on Environment and Natural Resources.

My name is Alex de Koning, and I am part owner, and CEO of Hollander and deKoning Shellfish Farms in Bar Harbor Maine which employs over 15 people. I moved to the US at 14 years old from the Netherlands where my family has been farming mussels since the 1770's, I graduated from UMaine with an engineering degree and at age 21 I became a US citizen. I provide testimony to you today urging you to vote Ought Not To Pass on LD 508.

While as a shellfish farm this bill would not impact me directly, the indirect impacts are very real and concerning. As a shellfish farmer our animals clean the water by feeding, which means my entire family's livelihood is dependent on clean waters and a healthy marine ecosystem. The biggest challenge our farm has faced in the last decade is the decrease in seed recruitment driven by the increase in green crab which love our rapidly warming waters. We decided over 5 years ago that we could no longer rely on wild intertidal seed settlement events to supply our farms, so after much research and communication with our European colleges we settled on a system that would provide for our farms seed needs today and in the future. In 2019 I submitted my final lease application to apply for a site to house this passive seed collecting network. That was in 2019, and even being a non-discharge system we have still not received a decision. This is because the leasing regulations for aquaculture are strong, and strict. In fact the regulations surrounding discharge from a net pen farm and a land based farm are the same.

I am against this proposal because it will absorb an unreasonable amount of time from DMR and DEP staff to man the study, and educate the variety of stakeholders regarding what the current regulations are. As an industry that's growing environmentally restorative food in a changing ecosystem we cant afford that delay, nor is it a good use of public resources. The root of this proposal is the American Aquafarms project which failed very early into the process with the DMR.

That project is pointed at as an example of the rules failing us, when in fact it's a fantastic example of the rules doing their job and preventing a bad proposal. There were numerous criteria within the leasing regulations that particular farm would have failed, however they didn't even make it to the point of having a complete application to evaluate.

Lastly, the makeup of this committee seems to presuppose a decision. We are discussing regulating net pen finfish, yet there is no member of the net pen fin fish industry on the committee. Out of 17 members there is one member from a trade organization, and one "small aquaculture" member which precludes the company farming fish in Maine. There are two non-profit organization spots, two wild harvesters (three if you count the lobster industry rep in there), and yet only one seat set aside for aquaculture. This is like discussing solar regulations on a board where there is no seat at the table for a solar project developer, and instead saying we have it covered by including a seat for a person with rooftop solar on their house.

Maine's aquaculture regulations are strong, and an inspiration to other states. Please let us fulfill the promise of low impact food production without getting further wrapped up in red tape.

Thank you.