

Colleen Brown  
Whiting  
LD 2216

Senator, Representative, and members of the Committee,

My name is Colleen Brown and I am a resident of Washington County and the mother of two commercial fishermen. I am submitting testimony regarding LD 2216, which proposes the creation of a Maine Blue Economy Center.

I appreciate the intent behind this bill. Maine should absolutely be thinking strategically about the future of ocean-based industries, including aquaculture, marine technology, and research. These sectors have the potential to contribute to our coastal economy and create jobs.

However, as the Legislature considers the development of a “blue economy” strategy, it is important to recognize a foundational fact: commercial fishing is already the backbone of Maine’s ocean economy.

Our working waterfronts, coastal communities, and maritime culture have been built around commercial fisheries for generations. In many coastal harbors today, the dominant presence remains the lobster fleet and other traditional fisheries. These industries are not emerging sectors. They are established, sustainable economic drivers that support thousands of Maine families.

For that reason, any policy framework developed under a Blue Economy Center should clearly recognize that commercial fishing grounds must be treated as the primary use of Maine’s coastal waters.

Emerging ocean industries should be planned and sited in a way that works around historic fishing grounds rather than displacing them.

I am not opposed to aquaculture or other marine industries. Many of these operations provide jobs and contribute to the regional economy. I believe these industries can coexist with commercial fishing. However, coexistence requires clear guardrails, including:

- Protection of historic fishing grounds and high-use commercial fishing areas
- Maintenance of navigation and gear corridors used by fishing vessels
- Meaningful representation of commercial fishermen in any advisory or governing structures created by the Blue Economy Center
- Transparent and independent environmental monitoring where industrial activities occur in the ocean

If Maine is going to expand its “blue economy,” we should do so in a way that builds upon the success of our commercial fisheries rather than putting them at risk.

A Blue Economy strategy that recognizes the priority of working fisheries while thoughtfully integrating new industries will better protect Maine’s coastal communities and maritime heritage for generations to come.

Thank you for your time and consideration.