

Dear Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and Members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee:

My name is Crystal Canney, and I am the Executive Director of Protect Maine's Fishing Heritage Foundation. On behalf of the Foundation, I am submitting testimony in opposition to LD 2216, "An Act to Establish the Maine Blue Economy Center," and urge the Committee to amend this legislation to accurately reflect the principles and recommendations set forth in the Blue Economy Task Force report that informed this legislation.

As you know, the Legislature created the Blue Economy Task Force to develop a comprehensive strategy for strengthening Maine's ocean economy while ensuring the long-term stewardship of the marine resources that sustain it. The Task Force defined the blue economy as economic activity that depends on the sustainable use of ocean resources to support economic vitality, good jobs, and healthy ecosystems. Equally important, the report emphasizes that Maine's blue economy must be "sustainable and equitable," meaning that economic growth must occur in ways that protect marine ecosystems and distribute benefits fairly among coastal communities, traditional industries, and emerging sectors.

Unfortunately, LD 2216 departs from that framework in several important respects.

First, the bill narrows the scope of the blue economy by focusing on a limited group of emerging sectors such as aquaculture, marine biotechnology, marine technology, and coastal infrastructure. While these industries are promising and were discussed in the Task Force report as opportunities for growth, they represent only a portion of Maine's blue economy.

By emphasizing these sectors while omitting others, the bill sidelines two foundational pillars of Maine's coastal economy:

- 1. The traditional wild fisheries industry.** Commercial fishing, including lobstering, and its supporting working waterfront infrastructure remain central to Maine's coastal identity and economy. These fisheries depend directly on healthy ocean ecosystems and responsible stewardship of marine resources. The Task Force recognized this reality and included traditional fisheries within the definition of Maine's blue economy. LD 2216, however, omits wild fisheries or their supporting industries into the definition of "blue economy sector."
- 2. Sustainable innovation and growth.** LD 2216 fails to incorporate a core tenet of the Task Force report: that economic investments must not degrade—and, indeed, must support and enhance—the marine ecosystem upon which the blue economy depends. Economic growth cannot come at the expense of the very natural resources that sustain coastal livelihoods. Maine's blue economy strategy must prioritize the long-term health of the Gulf of Maine ecosystem.

These two omissions are a significant departure from the task force's framework. If Maine's blue economy strategy is to succeed over the long term, the institutions we create must ensure that

innovation and investment strengthen—not undermine—our heritage fisheries and the marine environment on which they depend.

I respectfully urge the Committee to amend LD 2216 in four ways:

First, expand the definition of “blue economy sector” to include traditional wild fisheries, working waterfronts, and marine ecosystem research, restoration, and stewardship activities.

Second, incorporate the task force’s sustainability principles directly into the bill so that the Blue Economy Center is explicitly tasked with promoting economic development that protects Maine’s marine ecosystem.

Third, require that environmental sustainability be a primary consideration when awarding grants or making investments through the Maine Blue Economy Fund.

Fourth, ensure that the Center reflects the full diversity of Maine’s ocean economy and maintains a strong connection to the coastal communities that depend most directly on it by expanding the roster of board members to include voices from the commercial wild fisheries sector and marine ecological research institutions doing work in the Gulf of Maine.

The goal of a Blue Economy Center is worth pursuing. But it must reflect the full diversity of Maine’s ocean economy and ensure that innovation and growth strengthen, rather than undermine, the marine resources that our coastal communities depend on.

I have attached proposed amendments to LD 2011 for the Committee’s consideration.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Crystal Canney
Executive Director
Protect Maine’s Fishing Heritage Foundation

PROPOSED COMMITTEE AMENDMENT “ ” to S.P. 903, L.D. 2216, “An Act to Establish the Maine Blue Economy Center”

Amend the bill in section 1 by striking out the definition of “blue economy sector” and replacing it with the following definition:

1. Blue economy sector. “Blue economy sector” means the aggregate of persons engaged in any economic activity that depends upon the sustainable use of ocean, coastal, or marine resources and contributes to the economic vitality of the State while maintaining or improving the long-term health of marine ecosystems. Such economic activity may include, but is not limited to, business, manufacturing, research, and education activity relating to commercial wild fisheries, sustainable aquaculture and marine vegetation cultivation, marine biotechnology, ocean data and marine research, marine and coastal environmental science, resilient coastal infrastructure, working waterfront access and infrastructure, coastal ecosystem restoration and stewardship, and sustainable boat building or marine propulsion.

Amend the bill in section 1 by adding the following sentence as the first sentence of §13402 (page 1, line 29 of the L.D.):

The purpose of the Maine Blue Economy Center is to promote sustainable ocean-based economic development in the State by supporting innovation, coordination, and investment across the blue economy sector while ensuring the long-term ecological health of the Gulf of Maine and the marine resources upon which Maine’s coastal communities and the blue economy sector depend.

Amend the bill in section 1 by replacing sub-section 2.C(1) of §13403 (page 4, line 1 and 2 of the L.D.) with the following:

(1) A representative of a blue economy sector business relating to commercial wild fisheries in the State;

Amend the bill in section 1 by replacing sub-section 2.C(2) of §13403 (page 4, line 3 and 4 of the L.D.) with the following:

(2) A representative of a blue economy sector business relating to sustainable aquaculture and marine vegetation cultivation in the State;

Amend the bill in section 1 by replacing sub-section 2.C(3) of §13403 (page 4, line 5 and 6 of the L.D.) with the following:

(3) A representative of a nonprofit research institution based in the State that is involved in research and development in the blue economy sector;

(4) A representative of a nonprofit research institution or a private college or university that is involved in marine and coastal environmental research in the Gulf of Maine;

Amend the bill in section 1 by replacing the words “representative from” in sub-sections 2.C.(8) and (9) of §13403 (page 4, lines 16 and 17 of the L.D.) with “municipal official from a municipality whose territory includes coastal waters and is located in”

Amend the bill by adding a new subsection 3 to §13404 (page 5, line 40 of the L.D.) as follows:

3. Use of Funds. Prior to expending funds for a center project or awarding funds to eligible recipients, the board must determine, by a majority vote, that the funds will be used to promote growth or investment in the blue economy sector that protects, maintains, or enhances the long-term health and resilience of the Gulf of Maine marine ecosystem.

Amend the bill by relettering or renumbering any nonconsecutive Part letter or section number to read consecutively.

SUMMARY

This amendment replaces the definition of “blue economy sector,” establishes the purpose of the Maine Blue Economy Center to promote sustainable ocean-based economic development in the State, replaces a representative of the board from a business with 25 or more employees with a representative from a nonprofit research institution that is involved in marine and coastal environmental research in the Gulf of Maine, and by requiring the board to determine that funds will be used to promote growth or investment in the blue economy sector that protects, maintains, or enhances the long-term health and resilience of the Gulf of Maine marine ecosystem.

Crystal Canney
Protect Maine's Fishing Heritage Foundation
LD 2216

Testimony is attached.