



SIERRA CLUB

MAINE CHAPTER

PO Box 88
Belfast, ME 04915
Phone: (207) 761-5616
www.sierraclub.org/maine

To: Senator Curry, Representative Roberts and Members of the Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business Joint Committee

From: Becky Bartovics, Sierra Club Maine

Date: April 11, 2023

Re: Neither for nor against? Opposed? LD 1286; ***Resolve, to Establish the Blue Economy Task Force to Support Maine's Emergence as a Center for Blue Economy Innovation and Opportunity in the 21st Century***

Dear Co-Chairs Curry, Roberts and Members of the Joint Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business:

I am submitting the following testimony on behalf of Sierra Club Maine, representing over 22,000 supporters and members statewide. Founded in 1892, Sierra Club is one of our nation's oldest and largest environmental organizations. We work diligently to amplify the power of our 3.8 million members nationwide as we work towards combating climate change and promoting a just and sustainable economy. We move towards addressing climate changing strategies. We urge the Committee to vote 'ought not to pass' as currently written on LD 1286.

While the Blue Economy sounds like an interesting thing to support, the real emergency is the need to balance business interests with protecting our resources. As currently written, there is outsized influence on the task force given to big investors who are trying to drive our ocean and aquatic economy away from small business operations to large scale aquaculture based on contained animal feedlots, risking both small scale farmers and aquaculture as well as our environment. Although a Blue Economy Task Force would promote things like aquaculture, size, scale, impact, and ownership matter. For example, most Mainers are aligned on farming practices on land that are less impactful, locally owned and sustainable farms that grow a variety of crops/animals in regards to agriculture. The same should hold for our aquatic practices. Without clearer framing, this bill could cause unfettered extraction of our resources. Sierra Club looks forward to reviewing the proposed amendment mentioned by the bill sponsors during the public hearing aimed at addressing these concerns.

As currently written, this task force does not have **any** members who would hold the other members accountable for impacts to the ocean or land based environments. There are no environmental groups represented that do not already have a stake in large scale aquaculture¹.

It is vital to have more balanced representation on any Blue Economy task force in order to ensure business, community, and environment are not at odds. Specific types of aquaculture, like finfish aquaculture, pose huge concerns for our communities and the environment. From issues of infection and die offs², to their use of excessive amount of energy, to concerns of nitrogen and

¹ <https://www.islandinstitute.org/priorities/resilient-economies/marine-economy/>

² <https://www.wabi.tv/2021/09/23/maine-dep-looking-into-salmon-die-off-black-island-farm/>



SIERRA CLUB

MAINE CHAPTER

PO Box 88
Belfast, ME 04915
Phone: (207) 761-5616
www.sierraclub.org/maine

temperature contamination³, energy, and fresh water footprints are of serious concern as Maine is approached to become a major provider of farmed finfish.

The bill defines blue economy as: the sustainable use of the ocean's resources for economic health, improved livelihoods and jobs and ecosystem health, is one of the fastest growing global economic sectors. However, I only see one expectation relating to ecosystem health. Overall, the bill focuses on economic development, competitiveness, and investment. Those are important, but this Task Force seems heavily weighted to “overcome potential technical, economic, regulatory and other challenges to expand the blue economy.” Overcoming regulatory challenges in our political environment usually means eliminating laws that protect our environment. If this bill is really about protecting ecosystem health and sustainably using our ocean’s resources, it needs to be reframed to balance those competing interests. Jobs, business, and environmental protection are not mutually exclusive, and the duties should reflect that.

This Task Force as defined prioritizes economic benefits. As we grow this economy, we need to focus on cumulative impacts. We may seem to have plenty of fresh and salt water resources, but they are what makes this state what it is. Creating this task force with little to no “hat tilt” to environmental concerns as we face climate change is reckless at best and likely to cause serious downstream impacts to our existing industries. If the State of Maine is serious about developing aquatic resources, we must take into consideration long term preservation of our water resources for the legacy we leave our children. If Maine & Co’s recommendation of focusing on venture capital is prioritized, it leaves a window for big financial funders to put the small-scale backbone of the marine economy out of business.

We encourage the committee to vote ‘ought not to pass’ on LD 1286, or amend the bill to include the climate emergency and protection of natural resources and communities, and to add more diverse perspectives to any task force. The only way this Task Force should exist is if its intent is to balance conservation and economic development. Thank you for your time and consideration,

Becky Bartovics
Chapter Volunteer Leader
Sierra Club Maine

³https://8774567e-61ab-4355-a629-8a49a81506a2.filesusr.com/ugd/207e52_325649afaad2439c8316a864d2f24979.pdf?index=true