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I am writing to express strong opposition to LD 142, “An Act to Give the Commissioner of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Rule-making Authority To Establish a Bear Season Framework and Bag Limits,” based on the procedure by which it comes before the legislature and on the merits.

Procedurally, the sweeping changes provided in LD 142 -- giving the DIFW Commissioner the authority to modify the bear trapping season and proposing that more bears should be hunted and killed – should be discussed and considered in a forum where the citizens of Maine have a voice and rather than in a closed work session.

The MDIFW’s website states that its “constituents include the fish, wildlife and people who call Maine home . . .”. Hundreds of thousands of Mainers have in referenda expressed their objection to the collection methods that Maine alone allows – trapping, baiting and hounding. Future bear management should take into consideration these pressures for eliminating some or all of these methods of managing the bear population. The agency and public should have the benefit of appropriate scientific studies and input from state biologists. The agency and the public should know objectively and accurately what is the bear population and if it’s growing what is causing it, e.g., whether all of the bait that’s being used is contributing to growing the population indicating the agency should regulate lower amounts for shorter periods.

With regard to the agency’s responsibility to its “wildlife constituents,” public sentiment and debate is increasing about the ethics of using bait and hounds, and of allowing trapping at all. The agency should consider whether its hunting methods -- the most extreme in the country and widely regarded as the most cruel -- give any consideration to the bears, or instead are driven by commercialism and without regard to humane treatment and fair play, or the state’s reputation for these.

For all these reasons, I urge the committee to reject LD 142.

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