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MWUA

MAINE WATER UTILITIES ASSOCIATION

Organized in 1925

February 12, 2025

Honorable Joe Baldacci, Senate Chair
Honorable Tiffany Roberts, House Chair
Joint Legislative Committee on Inland Fisheries & Wildlife
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Re: Testimony in Support of LD 171 – An Act to Enhance Protections Regarding Invasive Aquatic Plant Infestations in Inland Waters of the State

Dear Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts, and Members of the Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife:

The Maine Water Utilities Association (MWUA) appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 171, which requires the commissioners of the departments of Environmental Protection (DEP) and Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (IF&W) to jointly review and recommend more stringent watercraft inspection protocols on inland waters of the State known to be infested with invasive aquatic plants and to review surface use restrictions and notification of those restrictions to members of the public.

About MWUA. MWUA is a nonprofit association based in Augusta that provides support for water works professionals throughout the State of Maine in advocating for safe drinking water through educational and technical programming as well as advocacy on the local, state, and national level. The Association was formed in 1925 and consists of approximately 86 utility and 60 associate members. Maine's water utilities provide service to approximately 700,000 Maine residents, thousands of Maine businesses and public institutions, and millions of visitors to Maine every year.

Background. Invasive plant species such as variable-leaf milfoil and hydrilla are non-native water plants that can rapidly infest water bodies eventually choking out native plants and other organisms. Additionally, infestations create unsightly conditions in Maine's pristine inland water bodies and interfere with traditional human uses such as fishing, boating, and swimming. Less obvious to the public are the larger implications of a public water supply becoming infested. Water quality degradation and actual physical blockage of water intake structures could occur rendering a once-premium water supply entirely unusable.

Since around 1970, numerous groups in Maine, both governmental and non-governmental, have worked hard against invasive plant infestations, occasionally winning in isolated water bodies, but more often these battles never end, requiring constant maintenance. Since the late 1990s, legislation adopted by this Legislature and implemented through several agencies has created a combination of carrots and sticks to limit further spread of these plants and have achieved measurable success along with occasional unexpected alliances among recreational water users, landowners, water utilities, and state agencies. Yet even with the visible success of these programs and actions, some of the infested water bodies will remain that way for the indefinite future.



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Discussion. Two of the key tools to prevent the spread of milfoil and other invasive plants are watercraft inspections and restrictions on use of all or part of the surface of water bodies (surface restrictions). Watercraft and the land vehicles that tow them are the most common method of transport of invasive plants from infested to non-infested water bodies. Disturbance of the water surface in areas of thick infestation breaks up many invasive plants creating many more particles to spread within the existing infested water body. LD 171 provides strong direction to DEP and IF&W to evaluate protocols for surface restrictions and watercraft inspections with a goal of making them more effective while at the same time looking at how this information on invasive plants is currently communicated to the public. When returning this information in a report prior to the beginning of 2026, the proposed bill also is seeking suggestions for legislation to implement changes coming from these evaluations. MWUA believes that these appropriately qualified departments are well-suited to execute the study and that it will produce outcomes that will benefit all active and passive surface water users, including customers of our member water utilities.

Conclusion. Maine is slowly losing acres of water bodies to invasive plant species; however, through public awareness, engagement, and enforcement actions, state agencies -- including DEP and IF&W -- have inarguably slowed the advance. Additional attention that evaluates present and possible future measures of inspecting watercraft, restricting disturbance of infested areas, and public communication of invasive plant information will likely result in a more effective, and hopefully even more successful battle against these plants. We encourage the committee to vote LD 171 -- ought to pass.

Thank you for your consideration,



Nicki Pellenz
Executive Director
Maine Water Utilities Association

cc: Roger Crouse, Chair, MWUA Legislative & Regulatory Affairs Committee
James I. Cohen, Verrill Dana, LLP, Legislative Counsel