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Testimony of Representative Robert Alley introducing LD 1146, “An Act To Protect Maine's Ocean Waters and Support Regulatory Oversight and the Long-term Health of the Aquaculture Industry” April 13, 2021

Good morning Senator Miramant, Representative McCreight and fellow members of the Marine Resources Committee. I am Representative Robert Alley, and I represent eleven communities in Washington County. I am here today to introduce LD 1146, “An Act To Protect Maine's Ocean Waters and Support Regulatory Oversight and the Long-term Health of the Aquaculture Industry.”

As a fourth generation lobsterman, I have learned many lessons out on the water. One of the most important is anticipating a coming storm. Unfortunately, I can see the large storm coming for the lobstermen and women of Maine and the future of this industry; it is big corporate aquaculture that remains unchecked.

I represent towns in the Maine legislature from Washington County whose waters yield some of the state's best lobster. It is not just the lobsters that keep our economic wheels rolling Downeast, but all the jobs lobstering supports – gear, bait, boats and fuel, to name a few. Over the past decade, I have watched as a foreign-owned company has leased 647 acres of the Maine Ocean. Our lobstermen and women are concerned about large leases and other industrialized aquaculture projects proposed for Maine's waters. That's why I am sponsoring this bill. The concerns I have heard range from the problems of navigating around large, industrialized fish farms to finding dead lobsters near the pens. Lobstermen have repeatedly raised concerns about being shut out of acreage where they have always fished. The scary thing is that any foreign company who

leases such large tracts of the public trust can lease up to 1,000 acres of the Maine ocean.

It is time for the state to take a step back and review its rules and regulations to reduce conflict between lobstermen and women, aquaculturists, and other stakeholders. Let me be clear, I am not anti-aquaculture. Aquaculture, done correctly, is good for the economy and the state. I am very concerned though about the scale of the aquaculture projects coming into Maine and creating conflict on the working waterfront. In part, this is happening because leases are being approved at a rate of 95%. The money that has followed the aquaculture industry has been based on research and development and growing the industry. This is happening at the same time the Department of Marine Resources (DMR) has had fewer staff for oversight and monitoring. It's not a good balance for the people of Maine or our coastline.

Maine has become attractive to industrialized aquaculture because of the large tracts that can be leased, the low fees to lease them, and, in part, because DMR has lacked adequate resources to monitor them. The concern around conflict and appropriate siting is spreading in Maine to smaller aquaculturists who don't want to be gobbled up by a big corporation. Some have expressed worries about large lease holders, the huge amounts of investment money that is following industrial aquaculture and the need to slow it down and take a breather. We are, in effect, selling our oceans without appropriate checks and balances in place.

That's why LD 1146 is so important. It calls for a statewide conversation with all stake holders, not just the traditional voices and well-paid special interests, at the table. It's clear that with the current rules and regulations in place that the horse is out of the barn, or rather, the fish is out of the pen. Our waters are a public resource, which makes it inherent on the Legislature to consider Maine's water in a thoughtful way instead of a hasty economic dash that hurts Maine's ocean.

It's time for us to step back, take a look at how what we now do affects our oceans for years to come, review the regulations and determine what is best for all who work, live, and recreate on the water. We have an opportunity to get this right – let's do it.

Thank you very much for your consideration.