



April 14, 2021

Written Testimony to the Committee on Marine Resources Opposition to LD 1146

Senator Miramant, Representative McCreight, Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources:

My name is Mitchell Lench, and I am the CEO and President of Ocean's Balance, a Maine based seaweed company. Ocean's Balance has a processing facility in Biddeford where it employs full-time employees and part time workers. We have our own kelp farms as well as we contract out kelp farming to lobstermen/lobsterwomen up and down the Maine coast. Our company also works with other Maine based co-manufacturers, seafood processors as well as we contract out work to local marketing firms, packaging designers, website builders, social media specialists, etc.

Our business is dependent on a predictable and reasonable marine regulatory environment. If a regulation is put in place to make sure every farmer remains small and unprofitable the economics of this business simply won't work and just as fast as this industry has started to gain some momentum it will slide in the opposite direction. What is needed right now are greater resources at the DMR so they are equipped to make well-reasoned and science based regulatory decisions as well as deal with backlog of lease applications.

One of the primary reasons that shellfish and kelp aquaculture has been growing rapidly is people are attracted to a livelihood where they can earn a living on the water while making a positive contribution to the ocean and more broadly the environment. It also provides an important alternative income stream for many lobstermen who are deeply concerned with the longer term viability of the lobster fishery. Rather than trying to slow down an industry that is positively impacting the oceans and where Maine has a strong comparative advantage, we should be working on reducing barriers and properly investing in its success.

Maine has the ideal ecosystem for seaweed to become a major industry that creates many jobs both on and off the water. We have a) a long coastline with cold and relatively clean water b) top notch marine science institutions and universities c) we're close to large metropolitan markets like Boston, New York, etc. d) there are a number of helpful organizations such as CEI, Island Institute, Darling Marine Center, GMRI, etc.



Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Mitchell Lench, CEO