

Jon Lewis
Boothbay

Senator Miramant
Representative McCreight
Members of the Committee
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I am Jon Lewis. I live in Boothbay. I worked in the Department of Marine Resources Aquaculture program for 23 years and retired in May 2020 as the Director of the Division of Aquaculture. From 1997 to 2020 I participated in most every public hearing on aquaculture leasing between Eastport and Kittery. I am confident, no one has a broader and more lengthy history of "taking the pulse" of the public's acceptance of aquaculture and opinions of the leasing process in the State of Maine.

As a society we owe a debt of gratitude to those who have advanced the state of the science and the development of farming methods in the last 40 years. Their efforts have provided us with the tools to take advantage of an opportunity in the face of diminished wild resources such as shrimp, urchins, blue mussels, cod, flounder, sea cucumbers, herring, and Atlantic salmon; and in the face of accelerating climate change. Aquaculture provides good food, economic opportunity, community resilience, and in many instances' beneficial ecological services.

In the last 5 to 10 years an increased level of funding and resources have been dedicated to research and development, job creation, promotion, and training for new entrants to aquaculture. Both the number of lease applications to DMR and the acreage requested by applicants have increased commensurately. At the current level of staffing at DMR, aquaculture lease application processing may take 2 to 3 years. Add these years to a grow-out period to market of 2 to 3 years and a new business owner may be looking at 4-6 years before income is produced; longer for profitability. The need for long term funding for the DMR aquaculture program should be evaluated.

I assure you the level of conflict between aquaculture and other users of the coastal waters has, and continues to, increase. If anyone tells you conflict does not exist, is not increasing, is at an acceptable level, or is being driven only by rich, shorefront property owners from away, I encourage you to ask them how many public hearings they have attended in the last 10 years. Yes, property owners are part of the equation but so are lobstermen, sailors, recreational boaters, recreational fishermen, clambers, other users of the waters, those with environmental concerns, and even local governments. The State has incurred highly significant legal costs to defend its decisions and is very likely to continue to do so unless something changes.

There is a growing dissatisfaction with the leasing process and the lack of discussion and public input as to the future and fabric of our coastal waters and how aquaculture contributes or detracts from it. There is concern about the likelihood for consolidation of the aquaculture sectors into the hands of a few large companies instead of many small farming operations. There is concern that 20 year lease terms and up to 1,000 acres being held by a single entity might be "setting the table" for future transfers and consolidation. Shared use conflicts, and long term economic opportunity should be evaluated. There is concern about the process of aquaculture leasing. LD 1146 serves to address this through a broad stakeholder meeting process with the goal of addressing these conflicts and seeking acceptable solutions.

It is my belief that this level of conflict and distrust of the leasing process, of farmers, and of other users need to be resolved if the people of the State of Maine are to be best served. The efforts of many have grown aquaculture from an idea to a shared reality. LD1146 is about our lives, livelihoods, and our economy. We owe it to ourselves to seek solutions to misunderstandings, shared uses, and conflicts if we are to choose our own destiny. To do otherwise is a disservice.

Thank you. I would be happy to answer any questions.

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