

## Testimony LD 1146

Senator Miramant, Representative McCreight, Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources. My name is Bill Mook, I live in Newcastle and I have owned and operated Mook Sea Farm, on the Damariscotta river for 36 years. I oppose LD 1146.

The current lease law is the product of over a dozen studies and revisions. There is nothing in this bill has not been considered multiple times before.

Aquaculture is creating new economic opportunities for Maine. New workers and entrepreneurs are staying in Maine and moving to Maine. They are young, passionate, and span the full spectrum of educational backgrounds.

When private companies are given lease rights:

- a. There must be ample opportunity for public review and input; and
- b. They must be held accountable for compliance with the terms and conditions of their leases.

In addition to fostering economic development, the current regulatory framework has been shaped and reshaped to do both things. Giving the DMR more resources to ensure compliance, the use of industry best practices, and the timely processing of new applications, would be a good investment and widely supported by the aquaculture sector.

However, LD 1146 is an effort—pure and simple, to restrict Maine aquaculture.

When the rules are followed, it is crucial that companies can count on renewing or transferring their leases. To have leases revert back to the State at renewal time and adding more bureaucracy would be redundant, jeopardize financing, investment, job creation, employee retention, and reduce company valuation.

Additional limitations on lease sizes and ownership interest is driven by the unfounded fear that consolidation will eliminate small operators and a desire to force aquaculture into an owner operator mode. LD 1146 ignores the fact that in states with more aquaculture than Maine, like Washington, Virginia, New York, and Connecticut, big companies, medium companies, and small companies thrive side by side. Many are multigenerational family owned businesses.

Removing the Title 38 exemption for leases greater than 5 acres, ignores the history of those exemptions, that when best practices are followed, aquaculture provides valuable ecological services, and importantly, unlike site development on land, aquaculture lease sites revert back to their natural state when gear is removed. This is a thinly veiled effort to allow objections to leases from wealthy land owners who don't want to look at shellfish farms. It would further clog the already overburdened leasing process and create even more divisions and controversy. It would favor large aquaculture companies, and threaten the future of Maine's working coastline.

The scale and scope of innovation required to survive and thrive in the face of climate change and a looming global food crisis demands a range of company sizes and a stable, predictable regulatory environment. We can't be changing course every time there is a contentious lease hearing. Our industry has a 40+ year history of collaboration and environmental stewardship, which will serve Maine well if we let it.

Thank you.