

Ted O'Meara
Yarmouth

Testimony in support of LD 1146
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Yarmouth, Maine

Senator Miramant, Representative McCreight and members of the committee, my name is Ted O'Meara and I am speaking today in support of LD 1146.

It is clear that aquaculture is an important and growing part of Maine's economy. We are fortunate to have many innovative and hard-working entrepreneurs growing mussels, oysters, scallops, kelp and the like in our clean coastal waters.

But it is also now increasingly clear that these same waters we have all worked so hard to protect are attracting big money from outside investors in large-scale industrial aquaculture projects – projects that dwarf anything we have seen previously and strain our state's ability to review and oversee them.

I am not anti-aquaculture. In fact, I was pleased to help introduce a large land-based aquaculture project to Maine in 2018, a project that is still working its way through the permitting and legal process.

I think we all agree that land-based aquaculture holds great promise for Maine because it removes many of the problems associated with net-pen fish farming: fish escape, disease, pollution from waste and feed, loss of large tracts of lobster fishing ground, and the destruction of viewsheds and recreational opportunities.

But raising finfish like salmon in huge pens is another story. I am currently working with a group to stop a massive industrial salmon farm in Frenchman Bay. A broad coalition of fishermen, small-scale aquaculture farmers, tourism-related businesses and local and seasonal residents are all coming together to try to stop this massive project adjacent to Acadia National Park.

I know these waters well. I was raised in Hancock County and have spent every summer of my life on and around this beautiful, unspoiled bay.

The developer, a man previously convicted of swindling investors out of millions of dollars, is proposing something of a size that would never be allowed in his home country of Norway. He is proposing to use experimental pen technology that has never been used on a scale this large anywhere in the world. He is proposing two arrays of 30 150-foot diameter pens, just offshore from Bar Harbor, that pose a serious threat of pollution and will have diesel generators, pumps and lights running all hours of the day and night.

Yet none of the people in homes and businesses in the communities around this bay will have a meaningful say in the DMR decision-making. Not the lobstermen. Not the hotel and motel owners. Not the kayak and sailboat tour operators. Not the other aquaculture operations, including the largest organic kelp in North America. Not the generous people who over the years have put the islands that ring the bay into conservation land. Not people who run and support the most beautiful park in our entire national park system.

If this project was a 100-acre hog farm in the middle of Mount Desert Island, it wouldn't stand a chance of getting approved, but because this huge industrial salmon farm happens to be on the water, its aquaculture lease will likely be approved, just like almost every other DMR lease application.

I attended an online DMR workshop on aquaculture leases a few months ago. It was instructive and the staff were friendly and knowledgeable, but every time an issue was raised that was outside of the current lease approval criteria, they would basically say "our hands are tied" because these are the criteria established by the legislature.

Well, it's time to re-visit those criteria and to add more protections and more opportunities for input from all the stakeholders impacted by these projects, not just the ones who happen to live within 1000 feet of a proposed lease.

The reality is, it's not DMR's hands that are tied; it the hands of Maine people that have been tied. It's time to change that, and LD 1146 is a good start.
Thank you.