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Aquaculture is a promising and growing industry in Maine and stands to benefit the economy. But, it is an industry that needs to happen in a thoughtful and guided way. It should not be allowed to grow at the rapid pace it currently is under legislation that was created more than a decade ago - legislation that was created before the rapid growth in the number of lease applications in the state.

I worked on ocean planning in the Northeast for nearly 10 years with the Ocean Conservancy, coordinating outreach to all types of stakeholders from wind energy companies to recreational boaters to large shipping companies. A foundation of this outreach and this planning process was finding balance - balance between existing and emerging uses and between human activities and the environment. The current rules that govern the aquaculture industry threaten to throw off this balance. The state currently approves of 99% of lease applications with no cap on how many can be granted in any particular area. There need to be limits in place to prevent this runaway pace of development.

The scale of aquaculture under the current legislation is not only inappropriate in sum but also at the level of each lease. Leasing individual areas as large as 100 acres and up to a total of 1000 acres to a single individual is not appropriate scale. Maine waters are supposed to be held in the public trust for all Maine citizens to use - not for a single owner to hold rights to 1000 acres of that water to the potential exclusion of other uses.

The lease period is also out of scale. These areas can be leased for 20 years - a time period over which conditions can change dramatically in the water. The Gulf of Maine is warming faster than 90% of the world's oceans. Things are certainly shifting and while aquaculture may be appropriate in a particular area now, there is no predicting whether that will be the case even 10 years from now, let alone 20.

It is time to set reasonable limits that put aquaculture into the context of other ocean uses. We must strike the balance necessary for the health of Maine's oceans and for the benefit of all who value and use the oceans. I am hopeful that the state will undertake the necessary revisions to the current aquaculture legislation in order to provide the limits and guidance that is currently lacking. I believe the currently proposed changes serve as a good starting place.