

My Name is Eric Oransky. I represent Maine Ocean Farms, an oyster farm in Freeport, Maine, where I grew up, my business partner Willy Leathers and our employees. We are opposed to LD 1146.

This bill threatens the very viability of our business, the aquaculture industry as a whole and the interconnected supply and distribution chains. In the big picture it threatens the working waterfront infrastructure, the character of coastal communities and the ability of Mainers to earn a living on the water. The two most concerning parts of the bill are the elimination of transferability of lease's and the removal of the NURPA site review exemption.

We have built a successful oyster company from the ground up. We created a very unique and high-value oyster through meticulous site selection, gear building and handling protocols. We have sold out of our oysters each year we've been to market. We have already pre-sold all of our product this 2021 season and most of our oysters for 2022 while doubling our seed input and market output each year.

In addition, during the same time period we have formed two other businesses that serve the aquaculture industry. The second, Casco Maine LLC provides aquaculture specific mooring system design and installation, and our third business, Ocean Farm Supply LLC created, developed and distributes biodegradable, compostable shellfish harvest bags nationally. We have done all of this with our own personal capital, by our bootstraps so to speak and with a massive amount of sweat equity. Our oyster farm was the incubator for the creation of the other two businesses and is at the heart of our operation. Without a viable oyster farm and a growing aquaculture industry that is supported by our state government, not stifled we will have to access whether Maine, our home is the right place for us to be in business. This year is the critical inflection point for Maine Ocean Farms where the last five years of our capital investment, time and energy will reach the point of becoming a sustainable and viable business.

Our prized "Wet Smack" oysters, just as all other oysters take on the flavor and character of the specific place they are grown. We could not grow our oysters anywhere else, even a half-mile away, or with any other type of gear or any other handling protocol. If the transferability of aquaculture lease's is revoked, we will no longer have our primary asset, our "Wet Smack" oyster's.

This bill, if passed would eliminate the possibility of our employees someday wanting to take over the farm if my partner and I decided to retire, or our ability to pass on the business to our own children in the future. It would eliminate any incentive for us to continue to invest time, money and energy into a business and industry that have so much potential to create jobs, improve the ecology of coastal water, produce healthy protein without any of the feed inputs or waste outputs of land-based meat production, generate hundreds of thousands of dollars in taxable revenue annually and continue the Maine way of life for so many earning a living on the water. Without the transferability of our lease and the unique oysters that are grown on it, our business is only worth our current inventory, our boats and the gear we own after depreciation, which is only a fraction of it's actual value when future earnings, our brand and our loyal

customers are considered. In addition, it would likely cause any diligent lenders to find that the aquaculture industry in Maine poses an unacceptable risk for investment causing a industry-wide collapse of aquaculture and our supply and distribution networks. It will impact all of our businesses, not just our oyster farm.

Secondly, if the NURPA site evaluation exemption is removed for leases over 5 acres it would stifle and delay the already stagnant leasing process to the point that no one would want to, or be able to afford financially to wait in line behind applicants for leases over 5 acres for the additional months or years that process would entail. Five acres is the minimum area that a small oyster farm could operate on to sustain a viable business and should not be subjected to this kind of scrutiny. The current leasing system and criteria for considering a lease is not broken although it is painfully slow at times and costing us potential revenue in the hundreds of thousands annually as it is already. If the leasing process is slowed down anymore, as it would certainly be by this bill it will not make sense for us to invest any more time or money into our business or the aquaculture industry.

This last year has required us all to be creative, optimistic, innovative and flexible just to stay in business, but in spite of so many challenges our business and so many others have found ways adapt, grow and flourish only to find ourselves having to defend ourselves now, in this hearing against the possibility of be starved out of business by the State Legislature changing the rules in the middle of the game. Delaying further an already arduously slow leasing process and stiffening an industry that is poised to generate so many jobs, food, encourage innovation, find new uses for and reasons to maintain and invest in working waterfront infrastructure that will otherwise be developed and lost forever changing the very character of the state and making it harder for anyone to continue to earn a living on the water. We will miss out on the massive economic growth potential that aquaculture for the state of Maine which is known for harvesting and producing the highest quality seafood and shellfish in the world.

In closing, if this bill is passed the repercussions will ripple through the interconnected industries including material and gear suppliers, seafood distributors, restaurants and tourism in addition to aquaculture. If passed, we at Maine Ocean Farms and many other small producers will be force to take a hard look at the books and possibly make the very difficult decision to sell all of the product we have in inventory this season, let our employees go this fall and liquidate our gear, boats and equipment. As this business, and the aquaculture industry in the State of Maine will no longer be a place where it is worth investing time, money and energy.

Thank you,
Capt. Eric Oransky
Founding Partner at Maine Ocean Farms LLC
info@maineoceanfarms.com
(207) 233-2575

Eric Oransky
Brunswick

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