



Monday, April 12, 2021

Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources  
Cross Building, Room 206  
Augusta, ME 04333

Senator Miramant, Representative McCreight, Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources;

Thank you for providing me the opportunity to speak with you this morning. My name is Dr. Meredith White, I live in Bath, and I am the Director of Research and Development at Mook Sea Farm in Walpole. I have been in this role for four and a half years, and it was this job that let me start building a life in Maine. Today I ask you to vote 'ought not to pass' on LD 1146, 'An Act to Protect Maine's Ocean Waters and Support Regulatory Oversight and the Long-term Health of the Aquaculture Industry'.

The existing leasing system is already designed with extensive regulatory oversight and has been repeatedly improved and refined over the years, already with the long-term health of the aquaculture industry and other existing uses of waterfront in mind. The somewhat vaguely-proposed changes in this bill will result in undue challenges to all aquaculturists. These changes will ultimately weaken an industry that is growing economically and attracting young people to the state. While I was unlucky enough to be born away, since childhood, it has been my dream and goal to live my life in Maine, not just to retire to Maine. The aquaculture industry made that dream a reality for me.

Business growth is critical to build new job opportunities. This bill appears intended to slow down growth in the aquaculture sector, by imposing regulations forcing a lease holder to go through a lengthy new application process for renewals or transfer of a lease – actions that are essential for business expansion. Similarly, the proposed limitations to individual leases and the total number of acres an individual can lease will reduce industry resiliency to economic challenges, such as COVID. As we learn from the field of ecology, a community always has increased resiliency with diversity, in this case, diversity of business sizes.

Finally, the proposed change to eliminate the exemption from the Natural Resources Protection Act (NRPA) for lease applications over five acres will drag out lease applications for additional and unnecessary studies, creating a backlog in the application process and affecting all applicants. The environmental benefits of shellfish aquaculture are too numerous to fully explain here, but they include wild stock restoration, nitrogen and phosphorus nutrient remediation, carbon sequestration, habitat services to other marine species which increase biodiversity, and defense of coastal erosion (see reference below). These environmental benefits make the NRPA review of shellfish lease applications unnecessary, as this industry has a net benefit to coastal ecosystems. Additionally, NRPA reviews could also include visual impact studies that open the door for wealthy retirees to oppose new, renewed, or transferred leases, making a small group of wealthy NIMBY landowners opponents of those who wish to make their living off the Maine waterfront in an environmentally sustainable and beneficial industry.

Please vote 'ought not to pass' so that Mainers and transplants from away have access to livelihoods that let them build and grow businesses on the Maine coast.

Sincerely,



Meredith White, PhD  
Director of Research and Development  
Mook Sea Farm  
meredith@mookseafarm.com

#### Reference

van der Schatte Olivier A, Jones L, Le Vay L, Christie M, Wilson J, Malham SK. 2020. A global review of the ecosystem services provided by bivalve aquaculture. *Reviews in Aquaculture* **12**:3-25.

**321 State Route 129, Walpole, ME 04573**  
**mookseafarm.com**  
**207-563-1456**