



DATE: April 13, 2021
TO: Committee on Marine Resources
FROM: Gayle Zydlewski, University of Maine Professor of Marine Sciences and Director of Maine Sea Grant, gayle.zydlewski@maine.edu
RE: **LD 1146, *An Act To Protect Maine's Ocean Waters and Support Regulatory Oversight and the Long-term Health of the Aquaculture Industry***

Senator Miramant, Representative McCreight and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources: I write on behalf of the University of Maine to inform your consideration of LD 1146, *An Act To Protect Maine's Ocean Waters and Support Regulatory Oversight and the Long-term Health of the Aquaculture Industry*. While the concept draft nature of this legislation makes it difficult to fully understand the direction of the bill, given its focus on sustaining and strengthening aquaculture, the university thought it would be helpful to update you on the development of the Maine Aquaculture Hub, which shares similar goals.

The Maine Aquaculture Hub (Hub) is a network that seeks to strengthen connections and collaborations among the many people, organizations and communities in our state involved in aquaculture. It is administered by Maine Sea Grant at UMaine, and funded by a three-year award from the National Sea Grant Program as part of a National Strategic Investment in Aquaculture.

Among its priorities is developing a 10-year roadmap for the future of sustainable aquaculture in the state that takes into account the changing conditions in our coastal waters and communities, including climate change and emerging markets and opportunities for multiple aquaculture sectors in Maine. A draft of that roadmap will be released for feedback later this spring, and has been developed from focus group discussions that engaged diverse voices including state and federal regulators; academic and private researchers; municipalities and tribes; relevant nonprofit organizations including those focused on environmental stewardship and fisheries; public, private and non-profit investors; aquaculturists from all sectors; and other marine-dependent industries, including lobstering, fishing and clam/worm digging.

The Hub is also training the next generation of the sea farming workforce, building on the existing Aquaculture in Shared Waters course. The current cohort includes 36 participants who are learning all aspects of running a successful aquaculture business, including stewardship responsibilities and social license, site selection, equipment and husbandry, permitting and regulation, environmental monitoring, marketing and sales, farm management and biosecurity, business planning, and financial management

Finally, the Hub is investing in promising projects and practices. Last August, it awarded more than \$200,000 in total to advance aquaculture innovation in Maine and diversify the industry. For example, the funds will allow the Saco-based Atlantic Sea Farms to purchase a kelp blancher to increase capacity for processing kelp so it can buy more from kelp harvesters up-and-down Maine's coast. Meanwhile, the Machias-based Downeast Fisheries Partnership will test cultured blue mussel seed in hopes of sustainably growing operations and the local economy. A second request for proposals will soon be issued for future Hub funding.

Thank you for the opportunity to share this information. We are excited about how the Hub is developing, and the impact this network and its activities is already having in promoting sea farming and related jobs, food security and economic and community growth while stewarding our natural resources for those whose living and quality of life is dependent upon them. We look forward to continued partnership with the Committee and our colleagues at the Maine Department of Marine Resources as we work together to advance aquaculture and other marine industries. If we can provide additional information in advance of your work session on LD 1146, please reach out to me and UMS Government Relations Director Sam Warren (samantha.warren@maine.edu).