

colleen francke
falmouth, maine /Summit Point LLC

Dear Marine Resources Committee,

I am writing you in opposition to LD 1146. As the owner of Summit Point LLC, an active kelp farm in Casco Bay, I see this proposal as potentially detrimental to the aquaculture industry and Maine's coastal economy as a whole.

As an applicant who is currently three years into the standard lease application process, I see the existing framework as adequate and thorough, including the work we do concerning community outreach and stakeholder meetings. My fear is that changes to the existing system would only slow the already lengthy leasing process and stress the already taxed and understaffed aquaculture department. I see it as unlikely that the State will grant more funding for positions in this department any time soon. An increase in processing time would only act as a barrier to entry for most.

Considering the length of time that it takes to get to lease decision, it is extremely difficult to not only secure traditional funding for our businesses, plan for any sort of future and growth within our companies, but it also significantly deters entry from other members of the fishing community who may be looking to transfer into aquaculture. Considering the mismanagement of so many of our resources, aquaculture is the last option for many. Maine's economy from the fishermen to the dock workers, processors, and delivery drivers depend on aquaculture's growth.

I believe that there should be caps made to annual lease fees and application permit costs, but I do not believe that this proposal will present reasonable limits. My sense is that the goal of this proposal is to make the cost of entry higher than achievable to limit the number of applications and therefore permit holders. I believe that caps should be set at their current limit to allow expansion and entry into the industry to continue.

I strongly oppose the idea of non-transferable leases. It gives little incentive for any business owner who may someday choose to retire, hope to transfer their operation to a family member, or more importantly move on from an aquaculture project if the need arises. I have personally seen numerous individuals unwillingly leave the fisheries, aquaculture included, due to health issues and injury. If they were unable to transfer, and therefore sell their business equipment to an interested party, those individuals may very well have been unable to afford their homes, their children's education, and the cost of their health care. I see this portion of the proposal as yet another tactic to reduce aquaculture along the Maine coastline. It puts individuals who have made significant investments in their aquaculture operations at risk.

I oppose limitations on lease size. As an applicant, we are already limited by restricted water quality areas, riparian access, navigational channels, environmental features, other fisheries, and so on. We should have the right to propose, apply for, and expand our growing capabilities in the "open areas." We should not make blanket laws for an industry as diverse as Maine's aquaculture industry. There are sectors of this industry that do not have permanent fixed-gear, and who work on seasonal rotations. If law changes are to be made pertaining to lease size, they should also factor in the type of gear being deployed, and for what portion of the year. Until this occurs, lease size requirements should remain where they are.

Thank you,
Colleen Francke