

# Written Testimony to the Committee on Marine Resources Opposition to LD 1146 April 13, 2021

By Gary Moretti, Bangs Island Mussels,  
a Maine family owned and operated Sea Farm

Senator Miramant and Representative McCreight, Distinguished Members of the Committee.

My name is Gary Moretti, and I am the co-owner, with my son Matthew, of Wild Ocean Aquaculture, growers of Bangs Island Mussels and kelp. I am also a commercial lobsterman of 34 years. For eleven years, our family has had the honor of utilizing a State of Maine lease site for aquaculture. We have stayed in conformity with all regulations imposed by:

1. The Department of Marine Resources
2. The United States Coast Guard
3. The US Army Corp of Engineers
4. The Maine Department of Environmental Protection
5. The United States Environmental Protection Agency
6. The Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife
7. Both OSHA and Jones Act regulations

I believe this would be considered “regulatory oversight” in the lease acquisition and maintenance process for a “Standard” aquaculture lease. Aquaculture in Maine is already intensely regulated, and Bangs Island Mussels completely supports the current process for Standard leases. We have not used a Limited Purpose Lease (LPA) and cannot speak to its regulations or use. **Increased funding for the Maine Department of Marine Resources would be a great place to start in supporting long term health for all marine industries, established and emerging.** We do not need a new law in order to increase funding.

Much of LD 1146 speaks to limiting the size of aquaculture farms. If we want to rebuild the working waterfront of the coast of Maine, beyond lobstering, we must create and support this emerging industry at a sustainable size. From our experience, building up to scale means more oversight in our business, our methods, our sustainability. We are risking too much to cut corners, take shortcuts, or game the system. Environmental threats are more likely to happen with low or underfunded farms, as they come and go. If you want to find funds for expansion from traditional sources, it must be as a real business, not a part-time hobby or a couple-acre boutique farm, just as, a bank may not pay for a new lobster boat if the fisherman is only allowed a small number of traps.

The action our family farm is taking now, as a result of growth, has profound effects on this emerging industry and all involved. We have invested 100% of our profits, over these 11 years, back into our company. Because of our slightly increased size, we are at the level of:

1. 17 employees year-round employed.
2. \$18.00 per hour, our lowest paid rate, a livable wage.
3. Full, quality health insurance provided, 100% paid, full and part-time employees.
4. Vacations and sick leaves

5. 100% Bio-degradable packaging and tags. We are the only live seafood in the US with this standard.
6. Biofuels in our boats when possible.
7. Bio-degradable vegetable based hydraulic fluid in all operations.
8. Ocean safe, non-toxic bottom paint on all our vessels.

At scale, we have reached 46 of the 50 US States with our Maine grown mussels. Maine is being recognized, again, for quality seafood beyond its iconic lobster. 95% of the US mussel market is still dominated by Canadian (PEI) mussels. We are slowly capturing market share, without the State and Federal support Canada gives to their aquaculture farms. Bangs Island Mussel farm supports and improves ocean health, global warming, and Lobster fishing. We are improving the opportunities of the working waterfront and supporting our Maine marine heritage. And our gains are fragile and easily erased. Maine's rich marine history and culture, our working waterfront way of life, is now solely dependent on lobster fishing. Help us create resilience, diversity, and growth in this depressed segment of Maine. As a commercial lobsterman, a family shellfish aquaculture owner/operator, and a member of the working waterfront, I oppose H.R. 1146, as it is written, as I believe it could have profound negative effects on our Maine aquaculture industry.

Thank you for your consideration of this opinion.

Gary Moretti

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