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In a state which governs by home rule and town meeting I am grateful to be here today to testify on the 131st Maine Legislature's LD 2003.

If this law passes and makes the act of Rockweed harvesting the act of fishing I fear we turn the Rockweed forests into a shrub at best and a lawn at worst. The Rockweed forest is essential habitat which is critical to species with commercial value (lobster, crab), juvenile fish (Pollack, Striped Bass) as well as many other species. I worked on a lobster boat as a sternman and then fished alone, often setting traps at the edge of Rockweed beds for both crab and lobster. Shore birds, wading birds, migratory birds and mammals use these beds for food. Before we enter into a difficult to manage deforestation of these beds we must use the scientific precautionary principal. Let us not jeopardize this ecological sanctuary as we may find this to be one more human error like PFAS contamination. Think of those species lost in our lifetime. You are their voices and they will be your legacy should this go wrong.

Some 48 years ago I started a Christmas Wreath business. If I were granted permission by you to harvest Balsam Fir tips from your forest I would need written permission from you in my possession, if not it would be considered stealing by the Forest Service and they could confiscate all tips in my possession, plus fine me. Stealing would help my bottom line but would violate both the law and my values. You could pass a landowner permission law for Rockweed harvesting. It would follow current law (Ross v. Acadian Seaplants) Getting permission is quite easy; some people say yes others say no, some want to be paid. This is the Maine way. The Rockweed industry should do this the Maine way too.

Relative to the legal harvesting and conservation of vital ecosystems I suggest the state set up managed zones by county with science based data establishing a spectrum of harvesting practices. It is my understanding that Cobscook Bay has such a management plan which could be evaluated by all stakeholders; harvesters, scientists, landowners, fisherman, conservationist etc. and accepted as is or modified and be adopted statewide by county. Let us find a win-win resolution to this ongoing conflict. I suggest that as a legislative body this is one of your leadership roles, aiding communities, individuals, and organizations to find compromise over difficult issues.

In respect to the open recreation intent of this bill I would like you to consider that this has already been established through the judicial process in Maine (Moody Beach ruling) and is currently being adjudicated in Cumberland County Superior Court (Our Maine Beaches) case. I would like to note here that on the plaintiff list of this suit there are at least five (5) plaintiffs engaged in the Rockweed/Seaweed industry or affiliated organizations (Our Maine Beaches website). I am not certain here what to think but suggest let this play out in court and not on the floor of the legislature. Additionally, how would opening the entire coastline be managed related to sanitary practices of food waste including wrappers, bottles, and cans. Visit any public beach in Maine during the summer and the waste baskets are overflowing. Will the state place wastebaskets throughout our coastline? Who would manage the customary fires for shore dinners. Currently you need a Maine Burn Permit even for fires in a fire pit (Maine Burn Permit website) Who would manage noise levels from CD players in your backyard at 2:00 am on a Saturday night. The local sheriff? The state police? Where would the recreational users place their own excrement? In the water? On the mudflats? In the Rockweed beds? This idea is simply impossible to manage adequately. To be clear, I am in favor of waterfront access. Would it not be better to reallocate state revenue to acquire waterfront property for public use. To what extent and at what price that is for you to decide. I allow public access to my land for hunting to those I know and if they respect the land. If they do not respect the land (bring out what you bring in) they get only one more chance. I am not confident that thousands of people from all over will do so, especially with no infrastructure or regulations. Are you that confident?

Before this bill receives an "ought to pass" vote from you please be cautious, gather all stakeholders by county or municipality and let your constituency develop plans with local input and local management plans which would result in a win-win resolution where people can make a living without destroying the ecosystem. I urge you to vote "not ought to pass" and thank you in advance for doing so. If I can be of help in any way to facilitate a stakeholder conversation, I am willing. Thank you for your hard work and for the opportunity for me to be heard.

Best,

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