

To: Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources
From: Emily Coffin, Policy Coordinator
Date: March 6th, 2025

Re: LD 336: An Act to Change the Waitlist System for Commercial Lobster and Crab Fishing Licenses

Dear Honorable Senator Tepler, Representative Hepler, and distinguished members of the Joint Committee on Marine Resources:



The Maine Coast Fishermen's Association (MCFA) is an industry-based nonprofit dedicated to restoring the fisheries of the Gulf of Maine and preserving Maine's iconic fishing communities for future generations. Founded by Maine fishermen to provide a voice in fisheries management, MCFA often advocates for conservation measures in order to protect shared resources.

MCFA is a vocal advocate of accessibility and the encouragement of new entrants to Maine fisheries for the sake of a healthy fishing industry and robust blue economy. **We, however, oppose LD 336 because it puts the lobster stock at risk, as it would dramatically increase effort on the population and disadvantage those who are already in the fishery by increasing competition.**

Maine lobstermen are known for their dedication to the health of the species they rely upon. The lobster industry has persisted through the years, while other stocks have fluctuated and diminished to an extreme to degree, because of the careful, considerate provisions put in place to maintain the population. As it stands, the current exit ratio for lobster licenses in each zone is such: Zone A (1:3) Zone B (1:3) Zone C (1:1) Zone D (1:5) Zone E (1:5) Zone F (1:5) Zone G (1:5). These ratios were voted on by the respective lobster councils and reflect the needs of each area. By changing the ratio across the board to 1:1, the number of licenses would rise sharply. At a time in which the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission projects a shrinking biomass, it would be unwise and unfair to those presently dependent on the fishery to compete for catch with an influx of new entrants. ASMFC conservation measures such as the increase in gauge size have sparked discontent among those in the fishing industry because it would shrink catch. It is not hard to imagine that a management body such as the commission might react with more controversial and conservatory measures in response to a surge in lobster licenses and effort on the stock. This would further divide this industry and put undue stress upon fishing families and communities.

An uptick in lobster licenses would also mean an uptick of ropes in the water. Firstly, this is an issue for areas with high gear density. Many bays along the coast are filled to the brim with traps and have little room for added strings of traps or even singles. Adding an influx of licenses and traps to crowded bays would be a recipe for competition and animosity amongst those in the industry.

Secondly, adding lines to the water would further set back the state's goals to remove rope from the water in accordance with Right Whale protection rules and regulations. Ropes are the reason that the federal government attempted to shut down the lobster fishery because of the potential danger they pose to the endangered whales. The fishery and the state are still in limbo as on-demand lobster gear is tested and developed by the few who are willing. State regulators and fishermen alike cannot afford to add more traps than necessary into the mix.

All this being said, the pressures on the industry, both social, economic, and regulatory, are immense. Adding effort to the fishery would negatively affect those financially dependent on lobster and the resilience of the industry as a whole. The exit ratios were determined and voted on by the Zone Councils which are entrusted to make the best decisions for their constituents. MCFA believes that the current ratios are satisfactory to a healthy expansion of the fishery and protection of the resource, of which we all depend greatly upon.

Thank you,
Emily Coffin, Policy Coordinator
Maine Coast Fishermen's Association

