

Lauren Gray
Cranberry Isles

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Lauren Gray. I am a standard lease and LPA license holder for my business, Cranberry Oysters. I have a 5.25 acre site located off of the Cranberry Isles. I am writing in opposition to LD 1146. I found the current lease process to be incredibly thorough as is. My application paperwork was deemed complete in May 2019 and my lease was granted in March of 2020. It took me a full-year while working another full-time job to acquire all of the documentation necessary in order to apply alone. Among other things, I was required to submit names of all fishermen actively fishing in the area of my proposed lease as well as all shorefront property owners and their addresses. These people were notified and had two advertised occasions to meet with me. DMR staff traveled to my proposed site location and photographed it, mapped it, dove on it, and observed all area uses in person. Local lobstermen were supportive of my project and what additional working waterfront opportunity it would mean for the limited remaining year-round population on our islands. They worked with me to make sure that my site did not impact their fishing grounds and that the gear was appropriate for location. Nearby waterfront landowners also attended the meeting, and while they too were supportive, I did make a few concessions to account for visual impact - changing my buoy color and reducing on site structures that interrupted the horizon line. It was important to me that I had their support and the prevailing attitude in our small community that working waterfront is vital to island sustainability was felt by all parties. My point is that my community cared strongly about supporting our traditional Maine economy, my area lobstermen worked with me and provided support and encouragement, and the current lease process facilitated those interactions.

I oppose the revocation of aquaculture's exemption to NURPA and Site development law because it will allow opponents to require visual impact and alternative site studies. I found the current lease process to be more than adequate for shoreline homeowners to share their concerns with DMR staff. Flora Drury, DMR staff member, even reached out to individuals who attended my hearing and offered for them to personally contact her. The public was able to record their concerns at the hearing to be considered as part of 1 of 10 lease criteria for review.

I am a small and growing business formerly a Maine island teacher investing my personal savings into the growth of my oyster company. Any additional requirements to my lease application process would be unnecessarily onerous to an already time-consuming and costly process. It was not easy to obtain a standard lease -- but I felt through the process the DMR both prioritized the working waterfront, the environment, and my community's concerns at its heart. We cannot push out the small business start-ups like myself, one of only 70 remaining year-round residents of my island community, through additional hurdles to flexibility and growth. I support the Maine Aquaculture Association in its efforts to find constructive solutions that address concerns while allowing Maine aquaculture businesses to grow.