



Community Shellfish Co.

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Testimony in Support of LD 983 – An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Promote Land Conservation, Working Waterfronts, Water Access, and Outdoor Recreation

April 26thth, 2021

Good afternoon Senator Breen, Representative Gattine, and members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, my name is John Marsh, and I have submitted this written testimony to share my perspective on the importance of supporting the Marine Economy through Working Waterfront and water access to those without ownership privilege in Maine and the positive implications of the Bond Issue you are considering.

I am the owner and CEO of Community Shellfish Co. in Bremen, Maine. I am also a selectman of Bremen for the record.

Community Shellfish is a diversified shellfish company with operations in clam and clam processing, oyster aquaculture, as well as being a lobster harbor and dealer servicing approximately 25 lobster fishermen. We have 25-30 full-time and seasonal employees.

Our lobster and aquaculture operations are located on the Medomak River on a 13 acre shorefront parcel which, in fact, is **already protected** under the program this bill would support: The DMR Working Waterfront Protection Program. We are currently the largest parcel of (deeded or otherwise) working waterfront in Maine and it has been preserved in perpetuity.

I can attest to the effectiveness of this program through experience. The previous owners: The Bremen Lobster Coop applied for a matching grant of \$240,000 in 2009-2010 to improve the physical plant, plant oysters in proximity and to build a lobster storage facility on the parcel. All these investments made possible by the program revitalized and upgraded the operation and added two new lines of revenue to their company. Those activities continue today and have given an otherwise antiquated business model new life and purpose. Most importantly, it preserved a valuable piece of shorefront for use by our marine economy and for the literally hundreds of people it employs and supports in traditional fishing, aquaculture, shoreside processing and logistics and UMaine DMC and Downeast Institute research activities.

To reiterate what the program has meant for the parcel, our company and employees, fishermen and community:

- It has given us a larger product and activity range, thus increasing revenues and profits creating a more sound and sustainable business model.
- Through aquaculture, it has helped us to diversify our exposure to wild-caught fisheries thus mitigating risk from the increasing volatility brought by climate change phenomena such as warming waters and erratic weather.
- It has validated Working Waterfront by adding jobs and new opportunities for the community; not only through operations but by fostering and supporting new aquaculture start-ups in our area.
- It has helped us more efficiently use our existing infra-structure and apply it for both traditional and new technologies.
- It has provided educational and research opportunities for our fishermen, community and Maine educators.
- It has preserved water access for the multitudes of commercial fishermen in our area; also providing valuable infrastructure to them.

Thus, it has helped us to be a stronger, more resilient and versatile working waterfront undertaking sustainable new marine businesses while supporting and embracing traditional activities and values.

We feel that there is a strong impetus to do this for many more of these important parcels on our coast before they are sold for other uses. The effects have been exponential for us, our town and our river if that is any indication of its critical importance for others. It has made a major difference.

I have said this before and will say it again that we and other working waterfront areas are not stand-alone entities. We are socio-economic hubs that provide good jobs to many people from the community, provide liquid markets for the daily catch (rain or shine) and provide marine infra-structure and facilities to a multitude of fishermen and harvesters and, of course, we supply the world with quality Maine products. People depend on us for all these things. The winnowing or loss of these entities would be catastrophic for the economic health and fabric of Coastal Maine and the effects would be widespread. That is why supporting this program at this pivotal time is so important for all of us.

Sincerely,

John B Marsh

John Marsh
CEO
Community Shellfish Co.