

Testimony from Mark Latti in support of LD 1452 “An Act To Allow Municipalities with Shellfish Conservation Ordinances To Request Permission To Prohibit Marine Worm Harvesting”.

I’m writing to ask for your support on LD 1452 “An Act To Allow Municipalities with Shellfish Conservation Ordinances To Request Permission To Prohibit Marine Worm Harvesting”. A public hearing will be held on Wednesday January 22nd at 10am at the Cross Office Building Room 206, there will be a workshop on this bill directly after public comment. As elected/appointed municipal officials and staff we are charged with administrating our local shellfish programs to the best of our abilities to help ensure the sustainability of those resources for future generations to come. Softshell clamming and marine worm harvesting are deep rooted in Maine’s coastal heritage. These iconic fisheries have been around for centuries. Within the last 20 years we have witnessed steep declines in other fisheries throughout our great state and it would be a travesty to allow these two industries to follow suit.

LD 1452 is being played out in the legislature by many as being an industry (clamming) versus industry (worming) issue, when in reality it is not giving preference to one industry over the other. As you will see in the attached amendments, both clamming and worming would be excluded from certain small protected areas along a town’s coast that a town identifies as being severely impacted by the green crab infestation and other global climate shifts. Towns with strategies would submit those plans to the Department of Marine Resources for review and if enough evidence and support is given, be allowed to protect the area from the two types of hand harvesting that occur in our intertidal zones. This gives those towns who chose to participate an opportunity to work toward stabilizing and restoring of these high value habitats and propagate our shellfish and worm populations. The Department of Marine Resources would maintain review & approval authority to decide whether or not a town meets the criteria to exclude harvesting activities, and whether or not the strategies deployed to help restore habitats is valid. Our coastline is changing right before our eyes and we need to decide whether to work toward adaptation and change or continue to manage these areas the way we have.

We are all very much aware of the economic environment of our state government, and to ask the Department of Marine Resources to develop these strategies along the entire coastal intertidal regions is simply unreasonable. Many towns find themselves in similar economic situations. It is my belief, based on over 20 years of observation and working in and around Casco Bay that our near shore habitats and its resources are in jeopardy. State shellfish and marine worm trends are at a 20 year low.

In the most recent 24 months we have witnessed drastic changes in our intertidal areas, most of which has been related to two major issues ocean acidification and green crab infestations, which both can be linked to climate shifts and change. We are headed down a slippery slope and if we don’t make decisions to work toward restoring these habitats and fisheries then we can surely predict disaster. Disaster not only in terms of sensitive areas, but rather more devastation to our local and state economies. We have already witnessed a significant loss in worming license, and we will surely witness a steep loss in shellfishing licenses over the next few years. This loss of licenses equate to local jobs. Jobs that have been influencing our coastal heritage for centuries.

Please consider supporting LD1452 by contacting your local legislative representatives and those members of the Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources that are listed below. Coastal Municipalities must be the leaders in ensuring that the health and vitality of our near shore resources remain vibrant and sustainable for future generations to enjoy.