

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

January 22, 2014

Submitted by Mark Latti, Brunswick Marine Resources Committee Chairman

Good Morning Senator Johnson, Representative Kumiega and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources. Thank you for the opportunity to speak. My name is Mark Latti, chairman of the town of Brunswick Marine Resources Committee, I am here offering testimony in support of LD 1452.

Today, you will hear many speaking about jobs. I am here representing clammers who have already lost their jobs. In Brunswick, we base our licenses upon soft shell clam population inventories. Two years ago in Brunswick, we had 68 licensed clammers and this year, we will have ~~30~~ 37.

That's a loss of nearly 30 local jobs. If this was a small business closing and losing thirty jobs, it would be front page news. However, these jobs seem to fade away without much notice.

Soft shell clam harvesting in Brunswick brings in over a million dollars in direct sales. This money stays local and helps support many small businesses such as general stores, gas stations, restaurants and marine supply stores.

Soft shell clam harvesting is the state's third most lucrative fishery, but it is an industry in crisis. Multiple factors are impacting the viability of the state's softshell clam resources.

Ocean acidification, climate change, green crabs and worm harvesting have all impacted the state's shellfish industry. Some factors, such as ocean acidification or climate change are beyond our control. Others such as green crabs and worm harvesting are factors that perhaps we can lessen the impact.

For instance, this past year, nearly a dozen Brunswick harvesters trapped and killed green crabs. We already have purchased 80 additional green crab traps for next year in order to increase our efforts to eradicate this invasive species by trapping and fencing.

However, even when we close and reseed an intertidal area with juvenile clams and then close it to clam harvesting, we cannot close it to worm harvesting. In recent years, as shown in the attached pictures, we have lost juvenile seed beds to worm harvesting as areas are turned over repeatedly, killing juvenile clams or leaving them exposed to predators such as gulls and green crabs.

It's like reseeding your front lawn, then having someone come in with a pitchfork and turn it over again and again, harvesting the nightcrawlers, killing your seed and your lawn, and then going elsewhere to dig some more.

We are here to today to seek help in protecting a small fraction of our intertidal flats, looking to protect areas that are reseeded and protected so we can rejuvenate our flats, jump start our local economy and help Maine families.

In Brunswick, Our softshell clam population survey shows a decline of nearly 33% over the last two years, which means clammers are losing their jobs. We need your help to protect the resource that is left.

LD 1452 would not only help protect jobs, it would help create jobs. By protecting and enhancing shellfish seed beds, softshell clam and worm populations will increase, allowing municipalities to increase the number of clamming licenses available.

With the approval of the Department of Marine Resources, municipalities could close up to ten percent of their intertidal flats to clamming and worming in order to protect and enhance soft shell clam populations.

We are not asking to close flats to harvesting everywhere, but just a small fraction of the harvestable area.

Clam and worm licenses are at a 20 year low and declining still, reflecting a dwindling stock. Regrettably, we as a state have a poor history of proactively managing fisheries. Scallops, shrimp, and sea urchins are just a few examples of fisheries stocks that are at or near historic lows. Let's not add worms and clams to the list.

Today, we have an opportunity to give clammers a chance to proactively manage their resource by protecting areas that are essential to rebuilding stocks while leaving over 90% of the flats available to wormers.

We are not asking you to close fisheries, but to protect them so we can rebuild them and create more harvesting jobs that we have now.

Years ago, the state allowed municipalities manage their shellfish populations, today we are asking for the tools to effectively rebuild this valuable resource.

Thank you.

Mark Latti





