



P.O. Box 549  
Brunswick, ME 04011

**Testimony in support of LD 1452**

**“An Act To Allow Municipalities with Shellfish Conservation Ordinances To Request Permission To Prohibit Marine Worm Harvesting”**

**Before the Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources  
Submitted by Resource Access International, LLC - Darcie Couture, Lead Scientist  
January 22, 2014**

Senator Johnson, Representative Kumega, and distinguished committee members - I appreciate the opportunity to speak in support of LD 1452. Because of the title of this bill, it may at first appear as though speaking in support of this bill is some sort of an indictment of our state worm harvesters, and I want to be clear, that is absolutely not the case. The worm harvesters find themselves caught in the same maelstrom of intertidal troubles that are shared by wild shellfish harvesters, aquaculturists, and environmental groups.

As the lead scientist of a local environmental monitoring company, with more than 20 years of professional experience in the field of environmental science in both New England and the mid-Atlantic states, I can honestly say that I have never witnessed the scale and velocity of habitat degradation that is occurring right now in the intertidal zones of the state of Maine. Coastal communities are under siege from a convergence of powerful environmental conditions, most likely driven by global climate change, and are experiencing the rapid decline of entire ecosystems, as eelgrass meadows disappear, invasive tunicates now cover large areas of sub-tidal mud, European green crabs have decimated bivalve shellfish populations, warming ocean temperatures open the door to new diseases and invasive species that should not be here in the Gulf of Maine, and ocean acidification impacts are further stressing an already highly stressed marine environment.

Maine towns and shellfish industry members are scrambling to find ways to mitigate and stabilize this damage, so that they may then find ways to either restore traditional habitat, or adapt to the new habitat that is left behind. The scale and scope of the problems in the intertidal zone, coupled with the need for an immediate response, far exceed the resources available at the state level, and coastal communities are already taking steps to commit greater resources to handle these problems, but they are poorly equipped with the legislative tools they need to do so. Innovative efforts to test solutions for these problems are already underway in many areas of the coast, but with no overarching authority to limit statewide licensed activities, such as worm harvesting, in these areas, the towns can never hope to truly make any headway in the struggle to test recovery methods and strategies that are vital to the future of the intertidal zone for all stakeholders.

The bill as written includes review by the Department of Marine Resources for any request by a town with a shellfish program to create a protected area, and amendments recommended by the Brunswick Marine Resources Committee further restricts these protected areas to remain a small percentage of the intertidal acreage in the town. This bill attempts to craft the restrictions in a way that is responsible, narrowly focused, and with state oversight. If we do nothing at this time, we further impede the critical work that is being done to save the intertidal zone for the future of all users in the state of Maine.

Respectfully submitted,

Darcie A. Couture - Lead Scientist / Principal  
Resource Access International, LLC

[Darcie.couture@att.net](mailto:Darcie.couture@att.net)

(207) 266-8984

[www.raillc.net](http://www.raillc.net)