Jefferson Oranellas

Testimony on LD 961

May 21, 2019

Good afternoon. Senator Miramant, Representative McCreight, and members of the committee, my name is Jefferson Oranellas, and I work for the Maine Division of Cape Cod Shellfish Company. I am here today representing a group of businesses that are involved in the harvesting, processing, distribution and retail sales of wild Maine mussels.

The businesses included Bristol Seafood, a processor and distributor in Portland; Euclid Fish Company, a broad line distributor based in Cleveland, Ohio; Hannaford Supermarkets; J.P.’s Shellfish, a processor and distribution business in Eliot; Maine Shellfish Company, a processor and distributor in Kennebunk and Ellsworth; and Moosabec Mussels, a mussel fishing and processing business in Jonesport. These companies have all been proactively working together for almost 2 years now through a process called a Fishery Improvement Project that is focused specifically on wild mussels in Maine. Our working group’s goal is to ensure the long-term health and viability of the mussel industry in the State.

One reason we are working together is because there is very little research or data available about the wild mussel populations in the state’s waters, and we would like to change that. Mussels are the fourth largest fishery by volume in the state, with landings over 9 million pounds in 2018. Landings are the only consistent data collected by the state. This results in a lack of information about how the mussel population is doing, which in turn makes it difficult to inform good management practices to ensure the Maine mussel fishery remains healthy and sustainable. Without monitoring or awareness of the population’s status, the people throughout the entire supply chain dependent on the mussel industry for their livelihoods, are at risk.

Additionally, the markets for this product are at risk as buyers increasingly look for sustainability and traceability in their supply chains. A local example is Ahold Delhaize US, parent company to Hannaford Supermarkets, who have determined that wild Maine mussels do not meet the criteria of their seafood sourcing policy. Rather than ceasing to buy from this fishery, Hannaford saw both a need and an opportunity for mussel supply chain members to advocate for better management and monitoring of this fishery. This is why we have formed a Fishery Improvement Project formed by a working group of mussel supply chain stakeholders.

Our working group believes it is critically important for more resources to be allocated to shellfish research funding that includes mussels. More research is needed on the state’s economically and ecologically important bivalve shellfish resources in general, including mussels. We understand that this bill as is will not include mussel research, but we are here to make sure the Committee is aware of our concerns and to lend our voices in support of more bivalve shellfish research funding. We would support LD 961 if it were amended to include mussels in the scope of the research funding.

Thank you for your time.