

Testimony of  
Maggie Raymond  
Associated Fisheries of Maine

To the  
Maine Legislature  
Marine Resource Committee

Regarding  
LD170  
An Act To Permit the Landing of Lobsters Harvested by Methods other than  
Conventional Traps

March 5, 2007

Senator Damon, Representative Percy, and members of the Marine Resource Committee, I am Maggie Raymond, Director, Associated Fisheries of Maine.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you today.

Associated Fisheries of Maine is a trade association of fishing and fishing dependent businesses. Membership includes harvesters, processors, fuel/gear/ice dealers, marine insurers and lenders, and other public and private individuals and businesses with an interest in commercial fishing.

Associated Fisheries of Maine has a long history of developing and advocating for sound conservation and management policy, and both the groundfish resource and fisheries managers have benefited from our pro-active participation in the management process.

I also want to emphasize that the dozens of fish harvesting members of Associated Fisheries of Maine are responsible for 45% of the annual landings of groundfish in the State of Maine.

**I am here today on behalf of Associated Fisheries of Maine to urge your support of LD170.**

First, let me dispute the myth that the groundfish resource is in trouble. Groundfish populations today are more robust than they have been in decades.

Despite the disparaging rhetoric of others, groundfishermen have not “ruined their industry”. Groundfishermen, like lobstermen, are genuinely committed to sustainable management practices for all marine resources.

New England groundfish populations are predicted to triple within the next 15-20 years with projected annual landings of nearly 300 million pounds. The state of Maine is on the verge of discarding its share of this valuable economic growth opportunity.

Unfortunately, the groundfish industry is not as healthy as the resource. The Governor and the Department of Marine Resources have been aware, for several years, of the steady economic decline in the groundfish industry. Associated Fisheries of Maine, and others in the industry, have met with the Governor and the Commissioner on many occasions to apprise them of deteriorating conditions and to seek their assistance in preserving what is left of the groundfish industry in Maine.

The New England groundfish industry is losing its economic viability because restrictions do not permit the full harvesting of the total allowable catch.

In 2004, New England's groundfishermen landed only 2/3 of the allowable catch set by scientists and managers, representing lost revenue to the fleet of at least \$35 million. In 2005, fish landings were half of what could be safely harvested and New England fishermen lost nearly \$50 million. As fishing restrictions increase, the gap between what scientists say fishermen can catch and what they land is expected to become even wider when 2006 statistics are tallied.

All fishing ports in New England have suffered as a result of the difficulty fisheries managers have with crafting regulations that protect a couple of weak stocks while allowing fishermen to land what can be safely harvested - but Maine's fleet has a particular disadvantage - Maine's fleet cannot benefit from revenue generated by the lobster bycatch landings that are permitted by the federal lobster management plan.

In an effort to remain economically viable, Maine's groundfish fleet is landing in Massachusetts where the fish, lobster bycatch, fuel, ice, and fishing gear purchases, and the valuable jobs generated by this activity are welcomed.

LD170 is the single most important action that the State can take to preserve what is left of the groundfish industry in the state of Maine.

LD170 does not authorize the *take* of lobsters by non-trap fishing gear – the federal lobster management plan already does that. LD170 simply permits the landing of lobsters in the State of Maine that are now being landed in Massachusetts.

Despite the highly emotional testimony you will hear to the contrary, LD170 does not pose a conservation threat to the lobster resource.

The lobster bycatch taken by the non-trap sector is fully accounted for in the lobster conservation and management plan. Historically, the non-trap sector takes about 2% of lobster resource in the entire Northeast region. (Lobster bycatch is allowed, by other New England states in many non-trap fisheries, not just the groundfish fishery.)

The non-trap landings of lobsters are so insignificant that the latest stock assessment report for lobsters does not even include a tally of the non-trap landings, and provides absolutely no management recommendations to reduce the non-trap landings.

In summary, LD170 will not harm the lobster industry and will greatly benefit the groundfish industry at no revenue cost to the State.

**Associated Fisheries of Maine urges the Committee to vote LD170 ought to pass.**