



NEW ENGLAND BACKCOUNTRY HUNTERS AND ANGLERS

February 16, 2023

To Chairman Bennett and the members of the House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

Re: BHA Support for RI - 2023 – H5037 – An Act Relation to Fish and Wildlife - Aquaculture

Backcountry Hunters & Anglers (BHA) seeks to ensure North America's outdoor heritage of hunting and fishing in a natural setting, and our members recognize the need to protect and enhance our outdoor heritage and wildlife in the few open spaces we have remaining. Rhode Island's shorelines and coastal waters are home to some of our most important natural resources, and provide some of our best outdoor recreation opportunities, so our members consider the protection of coastal resources and access to them a top priority.

With these things in mind, we urge the Committee to **support H5037**, which would implement a two-year moratorium on new aquaculture leases along the Sakonnet River within 1000' of the shore. While the General Assembly's Declaration of Intent (§ 20-10-1) recognizes aquaculture as "*a proper and effective method to cultivate plant and animal life*", it clearly places higher priority on the public use of coastal waters:

"The process of aquaculture should only be conducted within the waters of the state in a manner consistent with the best public interest, with particular consideration given to the effect of aquaculture on other uses of the free and common fishery and navigation, and the compatibility of aquaculture with the environment of the waters of the state"

Over the last couple years several things have become apparent with regard to aquaculture. First, the Coastal Resources Management Council's determination of compatibility has, at a minimum, resulted in considerable public opposition that extends far beyond immediate property owners. At times, BHA has opposed aquaculture applications that lacked sufficient consideration for current use by hunters and/or anglers. BHA also raised the issue of CRMC's tendency to prioritize the facilitation of commercial development at the cost of public benefit in testimony before last year's House Study Commission on CRMC Reorganization. Second, the rate at which public water is being leased for aquaculture is increasing, which is likely contributing to the increased public opposition. In the decade preceding 2009 CRMC added 21 new aquaculture leases covering 124 acres, and in the decade following added 50 new leases covering 190 new acres.

There is little doubt that hosting *some* appropriately sited aquaculture within Rhode Island's coastal waters will deliver environmental, economic, and societal benefits. The difficult question, though, is *where* those operations are compatible, and given the increasing rate at which coastal waters are being leased for private use, *how much* is compatible? We agree with the bill sponsors that corrective action is needed, and feel that the proposed temporary, geographically limited changes to the aquaculture siting status-quo are a reasonable and fair way to explore resolving increasing opposition. Respectfully, we urge the Committee to **support H5037**.

Thank you for your consideration of our position.

Sincerely,

Michael Woods
Saunderstown, RI 02874
rhodeisland@backcountryhunters.org

Chair, New England Chapter Board
Backcountry Hunters and Anglers