



RHODE ISLAND  
**SALTWATER  
ANGLERS**  
Association



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April 7, 2026

Chairman Shanley  
House State Government and Elections Committee  
via email: [HouseStateGovernmentandElections@rilegislature.gov](mailto:HouseStateGovernmentandElections@rilegislature.gov)

cc: Chair Shekarchi, Representative John Edwards

RE: Support H. 7996

Dear Chairman Shanley and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Rhode Island Saltwater Anglers Association (RISAA) we support H. 7996 because it makes significant improvements to the responsibilities of an agency that has been plagued by controversy, poor decision-making, and a lack of resources. The approach in H. 7996 to incorporate CRMC into DEM will better serve the public by creating greater accountability, promoting administrative and financial synergies, and reducing conflicts of interest.

1. **Accountability.** Eliminating the politically appointed CRMC volunteer Council Members gives final decision-making authority to qualified professional staff. That authority would be supervised by DEM's Executive Director, who reports directly to the Governor. H. 7996 replaces a fragmented volunteer decision structure with a clear chain of command—and a single point of accountability that voters can ultimately hold responsible. CRMC's current seven-member volunteer council diffuses responsibility, so when decisions are delayed or go wrong, accountability is unclear and consequences are rare.
2. **Synergies.** With an operating budget of only \$14.9mm, incorporating CRMC into the larger DEM's budget of \$164.4mm could provide CRMC access to resources that will give CRMC access to shared legal, IT, HR, and adjudication infrastructure that CRMC currently duplicates as a standalone agency. The bill preserves existing employee pay and status while eliminating redundant governance costs. Our conservative estimates suggest the merger could yield \$750,000 to \$1.2 million in annual savings — a figure that compounds over time.
3. **Conflict of Interests.** While there are other conflict of interests that have been identified, NOAA's 2025 review of CRMC is one example of a confirmed perceived conflict of interest. NOAA recommended changes within the aquaculture permitting process because a single CRMC staff member is responsible for permitting and promoting aquaculture. Incorporating this function and splitting it into existing areas of DEM will remove this conflict. Currently DEM separates permitting and promotion of seafood across multiple divisions so no single staff person controls both functions.

A member of RISAA served on the House Commission to study CRMC in 2021 to 2022. We are familiar with the changes recommended by the Commission. During the proceedings, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), which provides almost 40% of CRMC's funding, gave testimony for the Commission. NOAA indicated that while the coastal agency structure in Rhode Island is unusual but acceptable to them, NOAA did express concerns that CRMC's current structure has led to difficulties in achieving quorums for council meetings, delays in addressing critical matters, and insufficient training for council members.

Although the General Assembly passed a CRMC reform bill last year, the bill did not go far enough because it kept the politically appointed volunteer CRMC Council volunteer members even though those members were to now have expertise to match their position. The Governor's failure to appoint new Council members by March 1, 2026, as last year's reform bill required, demonstrates that the bill's approach was inadequate and unenforceable. The problems identified by NOAA still linger despite last year's reform efforts.

RISAA represents over 7,500 recreational anglers who contribute significantly to Rhode Island's maritime economy, generating millions in economic activity through fishing, tourism, and conservation efforts. Our members have experienced significant challenges with the CRMC from an aquaculture permitting process that favors the promotion of aquaculture at the expense of recreational uses of Public Trust waters to failures in permitting offshore wind involving the mass resignation of CRMC's fisheries advisory board.

CRMC needs changes in its structure to evolve with the many challenges since the agency was first started. We are confident that CRMC deficiencies can be corrected through H. 7996. We urge the committee to move this bill out of committee for passage.

Sincerely,

Rhode Island Saltwater Anglers Association

## Scott Travers

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## Rich Hittinger

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\* Savings estimate derived from analysis of the Rhode Island FY2027 Technical Appendix, Natural Resources (State of Rhode Island, Office of Management and Budget). CRMC's FY2027 recommended general revenue appropriation is \$4,324,771. representing the full cost of operating as a standalone agency. Conservative savings assume 17–28% efficiency capture through elimination of duplicative executive overhead, absorption of legal functions into DEM's existing Office of Legal Services (\$802,818, FY2027), and consolidation of contested case hearings into DEM's Office of Administrative Adjudication (\$375,968, FY2027). Capital transfers and federal grant funds are excluded from the analysis as they follow program purpose regardless of agency structure.