



**SEAWEED FISHERIES ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING
February 12, 2025**

In-person Meeting Minutes

Note: These are meeting minutes, not a transcript. Information from parties in this meeting was summarized and was not written verbatim.

A meeting of the Department of Marine Resources' (DMR) Seaweed Fisheries Advisory Council was held at 32 Blossom Lane in Augusta on the date listed above. Council members who attended: Shep Erhart, Dave Preston, Micah Woodcock, Sara Redmond, Jake Patryn, Dr. Nichole Price and Jaclyn Robidoux.

DMR Staff: Deirdre Gilbert, Katie Stein, Katie Tilton, Jen Harris, Matt Talbot, Troy Dow

Also in attendance in the audience: George Seaver, Jake Wilson, Robert Morse, Alison Feibel, Bonnie Tobey, Hannah Webber, Robin Hadlock Seeley and Allison Snow

1. Welcome and Introductions (3:30pm)

Seaweed Fisheries Advisory Council members and DMR staff introduced themselves.

2. Seaweed Fisheries AC 2023 Meeting Minutes

Minutes from the 2023 meeting were voted and approved by council (all in favor of accepting meeting minutes as submitted).

3. Seaweed Fisheries AC Remote Meeting Policy

The council voted to adopt the remote meeting policy as proposed (the vote was unanimous to accept the policy). There were two clarifying questions from the council that were addressed by Deirdre Gilbert.

4. Webber et al. 2023 Study (Maine Policy Review, Vol 32(2)) – management measures identified in article and discussion

Harvester training program: Members of the Council indicated that they would like to create a kind of training program, potentially similar to what exists for non-commercial lobster and crab licensing. The training might be multiple choice and could be required to obtain a harvester license. It could be a Pass / Fail exam. It would cover content from the FMP, basics: such as filling out a harvest by sector sheet, seaweed morphology, vessel safety, harvest sustainability; the training could start with rockweed species and then progress to cover other harvested seaweed species in the future. A training program may be an on-line exam, because this platform may be the easiest to implement. But this would

not necessarily be the preferred training model that the Council finally utilizes. A few members suggested utilizing two species to start or dividing it into rockweed and sea vegetables. It may be done once, or every year. There will be literature (like the FMP) that needs to be read to prepare for the exam. SFAC questioned if DMR would consider this type of harvester training / licensing exam? DMR responded that they have implemented several trainings, such as for Halibut and LPA licenses. This type of training would require a statutory change through a legislative bill, possibly in the Fall 2026 legislative session, with potential implementation in early 2027. DMR would look into how this may be implemented logistically and potentially paired with a seaweed license.

Third party biomass assessment: Members of the Council shared that a third party biomass assessment tool is currently being created, Coastal Ecosystem Map Application Platform (CEMAP), that may assist the DMR by providing assessments of seaweed biomass. Members of the Council asked if the DMR could utilize this tool kit. The DMR responded that the tool appears to require a subscription and there is a cost associated with obtaining the data. When DMR is relying upon data to make state management decisions, it is usually data that is publicly available and which the Department has participated in collecting. SFAC members brought up that other state Departments contract-out services (such as eel grass aerial assessments) and asked if there would be funding for something like this. To summarize, potential use of CEMAP needs further discussion between SFAC and the DMR as well as information about potential costs and funding mechanisms.

5. DMR Updates

A. DMR Kelp Meeting (Katie Stein): K. Stein summarized a meeting that occurred on December 19, 2024, where members of industry and the DMR met to discuss the status of Kelp in the State of Maine. It was the start of an ongoing conversation. Most people at the meeting were concerned about climate change. Discussions took place regarding the use of gametophyte culture, genetic make-up and diversity. There wasn't a general consensus at the meeting for activities moving forward, other than that more conversations are needed. Current DMR regulation states that industry must source sorus material from within Maine waters. K. Stein stated that currently a company can state in their application to the DMR where they are obtaining kelp sorus from, but it is not subsequently tracked and this would be a very large task to take on.

An SFAC member pointed out that the US is behind in this kind of research and more discussions are needed regarding generation of sterile/infertile strains of kelp and cross breeding with wild populations using infertile kelp. Another member of SFAC disagreed and stated that regulations Maine has are adequate and strains should be developed based on local populations because Maine has different bioregions.

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B. Marine Patrol Enforcement Policy (Matt Talbot): Colonel Talbot explained the protocols followed by Marine Patrol Officers (MPOs) when responding to seaweed complaints. The seaweed calls that MPOs receive are generally due to landowner complaints and people wanting to know more about seaweed harvest in general. Many of these calls are resolved with an explanation of what the harvesting activity is and an explanation of the license requirements. MPOs document the who, what, when, and where when complaints are received. If the landowner feels that theft has occurred, the MPO will request a copy of the deed from the landowner. In 2024, Marine Patrol had nine documented seaweed complaints. An SFAC member asked how boundaries are marked and Colonel Talbot discussed that MPO's collect evidence and evaluate the boundaries on a case by case basis.

C. Seaweed Management Fund (Deirdre Gilbert): D. Gilbert described the funds within the Seaweed Management Fund to members of the SFAC, who had requested it prior to the meeting. Currently the fund pays for 25% of the DMR staff person who serves as the Department's seaweed scientist. D. Gilbert stated that moving forward, the SFAC can think about potentially funding small projects, but it is important to consider how long the account can sustain any additional activity. Revenues are based on seaweed dealers reporting wet tons of seaweed purchased. SFAC members can think about if there are additional projects they want to consider. Only projects \$5,000 or less do not require an RFP. SFAC members questioned where most of the revenue of the fund came from. D. Gilbert explained that the main intent of the fund when it was created was for rockweed harvest. SFAC members shared that they thought the fund should be modified for other kinds of seaweed. Sea vegetables carry a higher value than rockweed. So the fund could be modified to generate more revenue. D. Gilbert clarified the relationship between seaweed licenses and surcharges and that a person only needs a buyers license if purchasing more than 10 wet tons of seaweed. There could be people buying small quantities of seaweed that don't need the license. An SFAC member asked what the outcome would be if the expenses in the account exceed what is in the account? D. Gilbert responded that DMR would have to fund the position off of a different account. To change the fee would require a legislative change (currently capped in statute at \$5 per wet ton).

6. Council Member Updates

A. Best Sustainable Practices (BSP) Guide Development (Shep Erhart)

S. Erhart stated that the BSP is incomplete, but the final product will be presented as a website. S. Erhart said they were trying to create a website before May. Jaclyn Robidoux (SFAC member) stated that one of the reasons for moving to an online resource with the guide is so that it can be updated and not re-printed each time it is edited. A website format

can be maintained to be more accurate, and easier for people to find the information as well as to upload/incorporate the latest research articles.

B. Seaweed Carbon Dioxide Removal (Nichole Price): N. Price provided an update on recent work regarding seaweed's role in carbon dioxide removal. Bigelow Laboratory recently completed a report titled Farming Seagrasses and Seaweeds: Responsible Restoration and Revenue Generation (Released September 12, 2024)¹. N. Price can distribute the report to any SFAC members that may be interested. In addition, the 2023 Maine Carbon budget included information about carbon sequestration by seaweed. N. Price also referred to an article in Nature Climate Change,² and an amendment in the Maine Department of Environmental Protection's (MDEP) 06-096c167(2)³, including Covered greenhouse gases. The Maine Blue Carbon network will hold another meeting in October.

D. Gilbert explained that DMR was asked for aquaculture data for the purpose of the calculation in the Maine Carbon budget, however it was not possible to link all seaweed landings to particular aquaculture leases and licenses. D. Gilbert stated that when aquaculture harvesters do their reporting, in some instances they don't refer to their lease site and refer to an area instead. The DMR is trying to make this information clearer and is discussing it with harvesters. N. Price stated that benchmark data was used in the report, making it very conservative. This was data the Maine Aquaculture Association provided.

7. Questions from Public: Questions from the audience were mainly centered around carbon dioxide removal and how carbon credits work. One member of the audience inquired when the SFAC minutes from this meeting would be made available for the public and how that process would occur. Members of the Council appeared open to having a few harvesters test out a trial training this season, to see how it goes, so that way it could be tested by industry before being presented to DMR for a statute change. There was a question towards the end of the discussion related to the buyers license and tonnage tax. D. Gilbert responded that the buyers license and surcharge law are distinct from Cobscook Law. Both were implemented within the same bill.

8. Meeting Adjourned (5:30pm)

¹ [FARMING SEAGRASSES AND SEAWEEDES: Responsible Restoration & Revenue Generation](#)

² [Carbon burial in sediments below seaweed farms matches that of Blue Carbon habitats | Nature Climate Change](#)

³ [096c167-2024-022-20-AMD-.docx](#) available at [Air Rules, Maine Department of Environmental Protection](#)