

February 18, 2009

State of Connecticut
General Assembly

In reference to:
Governor's Bill NO. 6371 – LCA No. 3044

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am Priscilla Wells and am the part time bookkeeper for a small shellfish company. I was informed yesterday that there is legislation pending that would impose a \$1.00 a bushel bag, (or equivalent) "shellfish harvest fee" for any person, firm, corporation, franchise or other entity engaged in the harvesting of shellfish from grounds, lying within the waters of the State of Connecticut.

I have some questions for the committee that I'd like you to considered before the implementation of such a tax. Can anyone on this committee tell me exactly how big a bushel of clams is? If I pack a bushel of 200 clams in one bag for one customer and 400 clams in another for a different customer, would that be "an equivalent"? Do any of you have any idea how you would implement counting bushels of shellfish in order to verify such a tax? This is not the time to add another layer of paperwork and verification on The Department of Aquaculture and to many small businesses. How do you expect to verify that people are paying the tax that they're supposed to? I am extremely frustrated with a government that develops ways to tax the little guy, but puts no effort into the implementation of such decisions. I believe this proposal to be one of those acts.

I'd like to know if you realize that we have to purchase and plant seed in order generate those shellfish? They are not your shellfish to tax! Just as the corn in the farmer's field is sown and harvested, we too have to tend our grounds and plant seed. We lease the ground from the State in order to plant shellfish seed that can take up to 3 or 4 years to reach maturity for our sales. Our business is weather dependent just like the farmers who plow a field. This may be the State's ground but this is our product to harvest.

A number of years ago the State of Connecticut implemented a minimum shellfish lease per acre rate of \$4.00 per acre. That is now the minimum any lessee pays. If the state needs money for the General Fund then I would suggest you consider raising the per acre amount another \$1.00. This would be most fair to all the industry players. It is an easily calculated number. An invoice per leased acre can be generated at any time because The Department of Aquaculture has those numbers readily available. It is also fairer to those who lease more acres to be billed on what they lease and have under cultivation as required and stated in our leases.

I understand that the State and everyone else is going through tough economic difficulties, but you do yourselves a disfavor by making many, many small players add another level of bookkeeping to their office paperwork, if they have an office at all.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am here fighting for my job. I have never felt more adamant that what you're asking this industry to do will be the death of many, including my position. I am vehemently opposed to this bill and hope you will reconsider some of the other ways that a tax could be calculated with the same results. There are sales reports and tax returns already sent to the state, The Department of Aquaculture has lease numbers available at any time. The numbers you are asking us to be taxed on, are an invasion of our private industry cultivation practices.

I respectfully ask the committee to vote against the implementation of Sec. 72 of Governor's Bill No. 6371.

Priscilla B. Wells
PO Box 452
Mystic, CT 06355
860-884-9531