

## Testimony for Public Hearing to CT Environmental Committee

March 20, 2015

Given by Indian River Shellfish (Clinton, CT)

*In Regards to Bill # 5722: AN ACT AUTHORIZING THE TAKING OF CERTAIN OYSTERS THAT ARE TWO AND ONE-HALF INCHES IN LENGTH. To authorize the taking of oysters that are two and one-half inches in length if such oysters are cultivated in a confined apparatus prior to such harvesting.*

**Dear Chairman and members of the Environmental Committee:**

My name is Michael Gilman and I am here representing the **Indian River Shellfish** Company which is located in Clinton and Madison Connecticut. As a co-owner, I would like to testify in support of bill #5722 and the taking of certain oysters that are two and one-half inches in length.

We, Indian River Shellfish, are speaking in support of this bill and its hopeful passage into law. We are one of a handful of shellfish growers in this state who use cages to cultivate and harvest oysters for consumption. Being able to harvest 2.5+” oysters would increase our potential sales market and allow us to compete in markets that are currently unavailable due to our current 3” harvest law.

Since the emergence of the “boutique” oyster market, shellfish farms in the northeast have had a new market to cater too. A boutique oyster is simply a smaller (sometimes rounder) oyster (roughly a 2.5” - 3” oyster) that has had profound effects on oyster bars in large cities like New York and Boston. Unfortunately, Connecticut is essentially the only eastern state that has been unable to solidify a portion of the boutique oyster market due to our current law. The laws of other eastern states are as follows:

**Maine: No size restriction on American oysters**

**Massachusetts: 2.5 inches with certain exceptions on out of state buyers.**

**New Jersey: No minimum size**

**New York: No minimum size**

**Rhode Island: No minimum size**

To summarize the listed information above, Connecticut is the only state that has a strict 3” harvest law for shellfish aquaculturists. This severely limits a market that has emerged in the last decade and has become very profitable for many shellfish companies in other states. The passage of this law will allow us to begin to form a boutique oyster market in CT. In addition, it will allow CT companies such as my

own (Indian River Shellfish) to compete with out of state companies in markets that we have not been able to even contend with. This is an exciting notion that can make Connecticut shellfish farms very relevant to other states and the overall shellfish market on the east coast.

In addition, our oyster growout methods do not involve dredging or destroying natural oyster ground in order to harvest oysters. We purchase seed oysters (4-6mm) and grow them in cages until they are harvestable. Although this requires time and aquaculture gear to work, it is environmentally friendly and minimizes our destruction of the seafloor dramatically. Thus, this law supports a more sustainable, environmentally friendly approach to shellfish farming and should motivate new farmers to grow in a similar fashion. This can usher in a new wave of healthy growing practices and allow Connecticut to compete with other states in the boutique oyster market. We believe that the passage of this law will only do good for the state of Connecticut, its shellfisherman and the customers who wish to eat the “boutique” oyster.