



Connecticut Department of  
**ENERGY &  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
PROTECTION**

**STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION**

Public Hearing – February 13, 2015  
Environment Committee

Testimony Submitted and Presented by Commissioner Robert J. Klee

**Raised House Bill No. 6733 – An Act Concerning Commercial Fishery Licensure Reforms.**

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding **Raised House Bill No. 6733 – An Act Concerning Commercial Fishery Licensure Reforms**. The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) welcomes the opportunity to offer the following testimony.

We appreciate the Committee’s willingness to raise this bill at the request of the DEEP. This proposal, which we strongly support, would allow the agency to issue new commercial fishing licenses for the first time in 20 years and better position the fishing industry to adapt and prosper in the face of ongoing environmental, economic and social change.

These revisions will provide an immediate opportunity, for anyone with interest, to buy a commercial fishing license to take underutilized species such as bluefish and dogfish by means of hook and line or to take underutilized Atlantic menhaden by use of a small personally tended gillnet - in areas presently open to commercial fishing. This bill also better aligns fees with fishing opportunity by lowering the fee for personal use lobster fishing licenses and by creating a new, less costly license for commercial lobstermen fishing 50 or fewer traps. Total license revenue is maintained or slightly enhanced by the addition of a small fee for quota-managed species landing endorsements and by an annual license renewal requirement.

Creating new opportunities for both current fishermen and newcomers is a critical step needed to preserve commercial fishing in our state. Participation in commercial fishing was already in decline when the lobster resource collapsed in the late 1990’s. The continued decline in lobster abundance, coupled with the moratorium on commercial licenses, in place since 1995, has accelerated the pace of decline in commercial fishing as a way of life in Connecticut. Yet, we want to take care that as we provide opportunities for “new blood” to enter commercial fisheries, we are sensitive to the sacrifices current fishermen in healthy fisheries have made over the last 20 years to conserve and rebuild those resources. We also need to reduce harvesting capacity in the lobster fishery, which the lobster resource itself cannot currently support.

To accomplish these goals, we propose maintaining the current moratorium on issuing new licenses for our most efficient and productive gears until the agency can craft regulations to provide for the controlled entry of new fishermen in balance with the capacity of the resource to support them. The retirement of inactive licenses is essential to “make room” for new entrants. This proposal calls for current license holders to renew

their licenses and permits annually to remain in the fishery. This annual renewal requirement will reduce harvesting capacity voluntarily through attrition.

An annual license renewal requirement is used in both New York and Rhode Island to manage harvesting capacity, and was widely supported for that purpose here in Connecticut by the Commercial Fishing Working Group that former Commissioner Esty assembled in 2012. That group was formed specifically to advise DEEP on commercial fisheries licensing reform. Once the renewal requirement is in place, DEEP can seek public input through the regulation-making process to identify and implement appropriate measures to balance the number of new licenses to be issued with the number retiring in each fishery.

This proposal also protects the investment active commercial fishermen have in their vessels by allowing them to transfer their active license to a person buying their 30 foot or larger fishing vessel. Resident licenses may be transferred to other residents, while non-resident license transfers are available to other non-residents under this proposal.

In addition to carefully reopening opportunities for commercial fishing, and positioning our commercial fishing industry to be more adaptable to changing conditions, this proposal, with the concurrence of the Department of Agriculture, transfers licensing and management responsibility for whelk species (once commonly called conch) from Agriculture to Energy and Environmental Protection.

Furthermore, this proposal adds definitions for common licensing related terms; provides the agency guidance for managing the number of new commercial fishing licenses to be issued; updates the penalty section to include significant violations of possession limits for quota-managed species among violations subject to fishing vessel permit sanctions; adopts uniform penal code designations for violations, making first offenses a class C misdemeanor, and subsequent offenses a class B misdemeanor; reduces violations involving sport-fishing for blue crabs to an infraction; clarifies that temporary license transfers due to temporary incapacity are limited to 12 months; makes falsely reporting a quota-managed species landing or sale a class D misdemeanor (instead of an infraction); provides added transparency to agency permitting by allowing public disclosure of the identity of persons holding any license, permit, endorsement, or registration issued for commercial fishing activity; adds transparency to the utilization of public resources and lessens administrative burden by specifying that catch or landings data aggregated by species, month and statistical catch reporting area may be publicly disclosed.

In summary, DEEP strongly supports **Raised House Bill No. 6733 – An Act Concerning Commercial Fishery Licensure Reforms** and looks forward to this first step to reinvigorate our commercial fishing industry, offering interested members of the public the opportunity to try their hand at commercial fishing for the first time in 20 years – at a scale that balances that opportunity with the principals of sustainable fishery management, sound ecosystem management, and the need for fisheries to be profitable.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on this proposal. If you should require any additional information, please contact Robert LaFrance, DEEP's Director of Governmental Affairs, at 860.424.3401 or [Robert.LaFrance@ct.gov](mailto:Robert.LaFrance@ct.gov) (or, Elizabeth McAuliffe, DEEP Legislative Liaison, at 860.424.3458 or [Elizabeth.McAuliffe@ct.gov](mailto:Elizabeth.McAuliffe@ct.gov)).