



## State of Connecticut

### HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STATE CAPITOL

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#### Testimony

#### In Support of SB 357 An Act Concerning The Promotion of The Shellfish Industry In Connecticut Environment Committee March 20, 2015

Good afternoon Senator Kennedy, Representative Albis, Senator Chapin, Representative Shaban and members of the Environment committee. I am Representative John Scott and am here to testify in support of SB 357 AN ACT CONCERNING THE PROMOTION OF THE SHELLFISH INDUSTRY IN CONNECTICUT.

SB 357 would create an Aquaculture Coordinating Council and would help to promote the states shell fishing industry through the coordination of policies and procedures emanating from the department of Aquaculture.

I represent the town of Groton, a town that has a very active shellfish commission and a burgeoning commercial shellfish hatchery. Our oysters have been recognized nationally for their quality, size, and flavor. I find it to be a tremendous source of pride to be at a restaurant anywhere in New England and find our delicious Noank oysters are on the menu.

Unfortunately and in spite of our successes, the shellfish industry in Groton has been hamstrung by actions taken by the Connecticut Department of Agriculture and its Aquaculture division. We need the help that would be provided by the passage of this bill.

Fifteen years ago Groton authorized and sponsored the creation of the Noank Aquaculture Co-op. A state of the art facility was created for the purpose of supporting small scale oyster farmers working in the town as well as our Fishers Island, New York neighbors. As I stated in my previous testimony this Co-op has significant economic and employment potential but has been hamstrung by a dysfunctional relationship that exists within the Department of Agriculture and the Bureau of Aquaculture. This relationship has limited their ability to grow and to fully utilize their state of the art facility.

To give you an example of the dysfunction with in the two agencies I can tell you that the arbitrary nature of decisions emanating out of the department of Aquaculture are egregious and highly unfair. The Noank co-op has been trying to open up an oyster storage facility for the past six years. Health and safety rules exist that require the two week closure of shell fishing beds if a significant rain event occurs in a twenty four hour period. To combat these closures the co-op has built a special, sanitary, state of the art indoor storage facility that would allow them to continue selling oysters during that two week period after a high volume rain event has occurred. They have not been able to open the storage facility due to an agency that seems to be empowered to make its own rules and change them any time it sees fit. Every time the co-op completes what they have been told is the last step necessary for them to open the storage facility, they are told that they have a new hurdle that they must get over.

Connecticut badly needs to support industry as we are seeing one example after another in the news on how we are not. The current regulatory environment is neither inviting nor supportive. Having a coordinating council as outlined in this legislation would go a long way towards supporting a significant Connecticut industry that is primarily run by small business owners. I encourage this committee to support SB357.

Thank you for your time today.