

**TESTIMONY OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE
BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON INLAND
FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE**

Support of L.D. 545

An Act To Enhance the Protection of Native Fish Species

SPONSORED BY: Representative JONES of Freedom

**Co-Sponsored By: Representative BOLDUC of Auburn
Representative BROOKS of Winterport
Representative SHORT of Pittsfield
Representative STANLEY of Medway**

Date of Hearing: April 9, 2013

Good afternoon Senator Dutremble, Representative Shaw and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Major Chris Cloutier of the Maine Warden Service and I will be representing the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife today and testifying in support of **L.D. 545**.

This bill would change the class of the crimes of illegal stocking of fish and illegal use of live bait from Class E to Class C; provides that, if a person is convicted of introducing, importing or transporting live fish without a permit, the Commissioner of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife is required to revoke all fishing and hunting licenses held by that person, and that person is ineligible to obtain a fishing or hunting license for a period of at least 10 years from the date of conviction; and provides that possession or transportation of live fish without authorization gives rise to a permissible inference that the person possessing or transporting the live fish does so for the purpose of illegally introducing the fish into inland waters.

The Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife is testifying in support of LD 545. Illegal fish introductions are the largest threat to Maine's fish populations and fishing heritage. Unauthorized introductions are particularly destructive to Maine's native fish species, especially brook trout populations. Introductions of invasive fish cause irreversible changes to entire aquatic ecosystems. Strategies to eliminate or control invasive fish are difficult to design and implement, costly, and are only effective in limited situations.

Recent news about strange South American Fish (Pacu) in Limestone, Maine or snakeheads in New York grab people's attentions, but the spread of more commonly known species (largemouth bass, northern pike, rainbow smelt, black crappie) constitute the greatest threat in Maine.

The penalties for illegally introducing fish into inland waters should rise to a level which should reflect the fact that it is the largest threat facing Maine's fish populations and fishing heritage. That being said, in considering a penalty of this magnitude the Department's intent would be to target only intentional violators who illegally introduce or stock fish in inland waters.

I would be glad to answer any questions at this time or during the work session.