

**State of Maine Blue Economy Task Force Meeting**  
**Tuesday, November 19, 2024, 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM EST**  
**Island Institute and Virtual via Zoom**

## **Meeting Summary**

### **Legislative Expectation**

“The Blue Economy Task Force (BETF) aims to support Maine's emergence as a center for blue economy innovation and opportunity in the 21st century. *Blue economy* means business sectors that rely on the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic health, improved livelihoods, jobs or ecosystem health.” ([LD 1286](#))

### **Meeting Objectives**

- Review draft working definition of the blue economy.
- Share initial summary on the consultations to date.
- Gain insight into how other states and countries have advanced initiatives in the blue economy space.
- Receive overview of recent roadmaps and other strategic plans for Maine.
- Continue to meet the requirements of the [statute](#).

### **In Attendance** (in person & via Zoom)

*Task Force Members:* Tim Agnew (Bold Ocean Ventures), Jeff Auger (Atlantic Aqua Farms), Nick Battista (Island Institute), Sebastian Belle (Maine Aquaculture Association), Dan Berger (Maine International Trade Center), Keith Bisson (CEI), Ben Coniff (Luke’s Lobster), Kristen Danaher (Washburn and Doughty), Chris Davis (Maine Aquaculture Innovation Center), Eliza Donoghue (Maine Renewable Energy Association), Blaine Grimes (GMRI), Scott Kleiman (Governor’s Office of Policy Innovation and the Future), Annie Langston Knoll (Maine Aquaculture Innovation Center), Liz MacDonald (Atlantic Sea Farms), Charlotte Mace (DECD), Ben Martens (Maine Coast Fishermen’s Association), Allison Melvin (Greenhead Lobster), Beth Orcutt (Bigelow Laboratory), Brendyn Sarnacki (Maine Maritime Academy), Nina Scheepers (Maine Venture Fund), Tom Sorby (Kingfish), Mike Szemerda (Cooke), Chip Terry (Blue Trace), Charles Tilberg (UNE), Jake Ward (University of Maine)

*Others:* Michael Conathan, Laura Singer, Charles Colgan, and Dana O’Brien (Project Consultants), Katrina Armstrong (University of Maine), Joshua Berger (Washington Maritime Blue), Lisa Carnevale (Rhode Island Commerce Department), Christian Cowan (University of Rhode Island Research Foundation), Anne Schlitt (Maine Development Foundation)

Meeting slides are available [here](#).

## Agenda and Summary

- **Welcome/Introductions:** Michael Conathan (Lead Project Consultant) welcomed the Task Force and introduced the consulting team.
- **Review Agenda:** Laura Singer (Project Consultant) shared the agenda, highlighted meeting logistics, and referenced the shared Google drive where Task Force materials are housed.
- **Review of Existing Maine Economic Development and Marine Economy Roadmaps:** Dana O'Brien (Project Consultant) highlighted commonalities across various existing state economic development and marine economy roadmaps, including "mega trends" like climate change, national security, and food security, and themes related to access and innovation. Mr. O'Brien noted that many of those trends and themes are reappearing in Task Force consultations and suggested the Task Force may wish to consider referring to areas of significant agreement across the various roadmaps in the final report to the State Legislature.
- **Overview of Consultations:** Mr. Conathan and Ms. Singer presented a [document](#) summarizing all consultations held to date and noted common themes and unique opportunities for Maine that are emerging in these consultations. Members of the Task Force provided their perspectives and generated new input.
- **Blue Economy Efforts in Other States and Countries:** Guests from Rhode Island and Washington discussed successful blue economy clusters in those states, noting the origins, implementation strategies, and partnerships responsible for retaining and growing each cluster. Dr. Colgan provided an overview of several successful foreign blue economy clusters. Members of the Task Force asked numerous questions to gain insight on how Maine might learn from other states and nations in its recommendations to the State Legislature.
- **Defining Maine's Blue Economy:** This agenda item was postponed due to time constraints.
- **Next Steps:** Mr. Conathan and Ms. Singer provided an overview of work to be completed in the next few weeks and expectations for the December in-person meeting, which will be changed to a longer meeting at a different location to maximize in-person attendance.

## Discussion

Regarding the roadmaps and consultations:

- Members noted the value in framing the work of the Task Force in an aspirational tone, noting how blue economy investments will improve the state of Maine by creating new opportunities for people and families, increasing the tax base in towns throughout the state, which enhances communities and grows Maine's GDP.

- Members noted that extreme storms brought on by climate change pose extreme risk to Maine's coastline and its people. The state currently lacks the tools and resources to effectively manage risk and invest in sizable reconstruction projects that will be required to enhance resilience to Maine's working waterfronts. It was noted that without this investment in coastal construction, it will be more difficult for our heritage fishing sector to thrive and for new blue economy investments to flourish.
- Members reinforced significant workforce and cost of living challenges heard in several consultations to date. Some noted that housing costs driven by gentrification and increased numbers of remote workers are exacerbating cost of living challenges. But others noted that big investments to expand rural broadband access, which are enabling remote work, are also responsible for better connecting the players in Maine's blue economy – shortening distances through virtual meeting opportunities (e.g. Zoom) and other technologies – which is a very important positive development.
- Members reinforced the need to build on the historic successes and significant contributions to the economy and culture of Maine's heritage fishing industry. Discussion centered on finding emerging and evolving opportunities for industry participants as we look to the future.

Regarding the presentations on blue economy clusters in other states and countries:

- Members focused on better understanding the origins of successful Rhode Island and Washington state enterprises, including how they were funded and organized and how decisions were made to prioritize economic sectors.
- Rhode Island leaders noted that their state has been successful because of strong political leadership from its members of Congress and state government who brought together the state's blue economy stakeholders who designed a strategy and action plan that was funded by Congress and the state. Washington leaders similarly noted strong political support from the state's Governor who prioritized and funded action.
- Each state drew upon its unique strengths when deciding how to build a successful blue economy cluster.

## **Next Steps**

Consultants will continue holding necessary consultations, condense and consolidate feedback gained in each remaining consultation, and begin outlining a final report framework to be presented and discussed at the next Task Force meeting. Upcoming monthly meetings will be offered both in-person and via Zoom and members are encouraged to participate in-person whenever practical.

Upcoming Meetings:

- December 12, 11:00 AM – 2:00 PM, Wishcamper Center, University of Southern Maine
  - Working session, including breakout groups to review a draft report outline and make final suggestions on content and recommendations to the legislature.
- January 10, 12:00 PM – 2:00 PM, via Zoom - no in-person meeting
  - Working session to review and make final editorial suggestions to the Draft Final Report.
- February (and beyond) TBD