

## Aquaculture Advisory Council

### Meeting Minutes

April 29, 2026, from 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Augusta DMR Room 118 or Microsoft Teams

Call to order – **Greg Lambert**

**09:00-09:01**

Roll call – **William Fearn**

**09:01-09:03**

|                                     |                        |                                     |                 |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Greg Lambert -Chair    | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Lauren Gray     |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Will Owen – Vice Chair | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Matt Moretti    |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Jake Patryn            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Steve Zimmerman |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | Christopher Davis      |                                     |                 |

Adoption of minutes from last meeting – **Greg Lambert**

**09:03-09:07**

Lauren Gray motioned; Jake Patryn second

Aquaculture Division Updates – **Amanda Ellis**

**09:07-09:50**

**Renewal Expiration Reminder** – With the implementation of L.D. 1722, Dr. Amanda Ellis wanted to reiterate the importance of lease holders knowing the expiration dates of their sites, so that they file applications in a timely manner and avoid the site being terminated. Dr. Ellis noted that a lease site was recently terminated under this new law and that DMR cannot entertain any exceptions to the law. Dr. Ellis explained that DMR sends two courtesy reminders, via email, to the lease holder before the site expires. However, it is the responsibility of the lease holder to ensure that their contact information with DMR is up to date to ensure that they do not miss important reminders surrounding their lease sites.

**Hiring Update** – Dr. Ellis reminded the committee of the four new positions that were created – Management Analyst II, two Marine Resource Management Coordinators (MRMC) (Hearing Officer and a dedicated Land Based Aquaculture (LBA) position), and one Scientist I and their hiring statuses. The Management Analyst II position has been filled by Angela Hopkins, who was the Secretary Specialist and the Scientist I position has been filled by Katie VonHohenleiten, who was previously a Scientist I within the AQ Division. Therefore, the AQ Division is now filling the vacated Secretary Specialist and Scientist I positions. Melissa Biggs was recently hired as an MRMC for the LBA position.

**GIS Updates** – The Aquaculture Webmap is currently being updated and moved to a new platform. In her new role, Katie VonHohenleiten has created an MSX layer and Denied AQ

Lease Sites Layer for webmap users to access. Future layers that are currently being worked on include a layer that shows the 1,000-foot buffer around existing LPA sites.

**LD 2025** – Dr. Ellis began by giving the committee background on the legislative changes in LD 2025. Dr. Ellis noted that LD 2025 was signed on April 13, 2026, and will become effective 90 days at the close of the legislative session, approximately around the end of July. Dr. Ellis suggested that because DMR undertakes rule making quarterly, she was reaching out to the committee for input on developing and drafting rule changes and recommended reconvening the LD 2025 committee to discuss proposed changes. Committee member Lauren Gray and Jake Patryn will reconvene the committee, with the support of Steve Zimmerman.

**Questions:** Committee Chairperson Greg Lambert asked about the potential time frame for hiring a Hearings Officer. Dr. Ellis stated that she is anticipating a month or two before someone is hired and will update the committee at the next committee meeting.

Committee member Lauren Gray asked if DMR mails a physical reminder to lease holders of their expiration dates. Dr. Ellis stated that DMR uses an automated system that emails reminders 120 days and 60-days before the lease expires to the lease holder. Ms. Gray asked if there was a way to make exceptions for individuals that missed their opportunity to renew their leases. Dr. Ellis clarified that the law does not provide any exception and to create one would require a statutory change. Dr. Ellis stated that the law attempted to balance timely filing of applications with the fact that lease renewals are no longer adjudicatory.

**Payment Platform** – Dr. Ellis presented to the committee that currently, DMR does not take or handle any payments for aquaculture applications and that a separate state agency, the Natural Resources Service Center (NRSC), handles the processing of those payments. The current system requires stakeholders to call NRSC to make payments and that representatives have limited availability to take payments. DMR recognizes that it can be frustrating for stakeholders who are looking to connect with a representative to make payment. DMR is currently looking into launching self-service payment processing system called PayMaine. PayMaine is not ready to launch yet, once it is ready for launch, DMR will communicate with industry members.

**Marine Algae Applications** – The Aquaculture Division is currently seeing an increased number of withdrawals and termination of applications and lease sites associated with a marine algae company in southern Maine. Dr. Ellis highlighted that DMR has been investing a considerable amount of effort into these applications and hearings for applicants that are ultimately withdrawing their applications from review.

**Electronic Application** – Dr. Ellis gave the committee an update concerning the upcoming electronic application system. While DMR does not have an exact launch date, it is proposed to be available in summer of 2026. Stratosphere, the company responsible for working with DMR to develop the application system, put together a promotional video that was presented to the committee.

Electronic Application Demo – **Lisa White**

**09:28-09:49**

Lisa White, DMR Aquaculture Outreach and Education Coordinator, provided an update to the committee. Part of the update included how the platform will work and how it will aid in streamlining the process to ensure that applications move through the system and provide transparency to applicants.

**Questions** – Ms. Gray asked about how attachments will be handled in the application process. Ms. White stated that currently, the applicant will be required to upload any required documents to the electronic application portal. Ms. Gray also asked if the edits would remain on the digital platform or how would DMR convey that edits are needed on the application. Ms. White responded that it would remain within the application and DMR would notify the applicant that edits would need to be made.

Lab Sample Summary – **Amy Webb**

**09:49-09:55**

Amy Webb presented to the committee on the water Quality and biotoxin program. Ms. Webb's presentation included an overview on what the program does, as well as providing statistics on the kinds and amount of sampling that is done throughout Maine's coastal communities.

Aquaculture Landings – **Kohl Kanwit**

**09:55-10:06**

**AQ Landings Report** –Kohl Kanwit, Director, Bureau of Public Health and Aquaculture, presented a report for aquaculture landings to help provide industry with an understanding of the type and amount of product being reported. Ms. Kanwit stated that the value of this information is pertinent not only to industry, but to municipalities and outside industry members who may not understand the value that aquaculture could bring to the area.

Emergency Lease Process – **Amanda Ellis**

**10:07-10:28**

Dr. Ellis stated that during the winter/spring 2026 rulemaking process, a lot of public comments submitted indicated that there is a lot of misunderstanding about emergency leases, including their purpose. Dr. Ellis gave an overview of the emergency laws and how the process works. Dr. Ellis clarified that an illness outbreak, like salmonella or campylobacter, does not constitute an emergency because lease holders are required to provide bird mitigation procedures, as it is a known risk. Mr. Lambert asked what the

anticipated time frame would be if someone was to apply for an emergency lease site. Dr. Ellis anticipated that a decision could be issued in one to two months.

#### Work plan - **Greg Lambert**

#### **Active**

**10:28-10:53**

##### 1. Lease Process Improvements Committee (J. Patryn) - update

Committee member Jake Patryn gave an update on the Lease Process Improvement Committee. LD2025 was passed on April 2, 2026, and Ms. Kanwit provided feedback surrounding changes coming from the committee, stating that the committee can continue to discuss with the council any changes they would like to see. Mr. Lambert clarified that committees can be inactive and reconvened as needed.

##### 2. Bonding Committee (C. Davis) - Update

In the absence of Committee member Chris Davis, Ms. Kanwit provided an update on the bonding committee and stated that some topical experts have been consulted to understand bonds and escrow comprehensively and how they can be applied to DMR's aquaculture process. The committee is currently looking at how they can improve the system or how they can add LPAs into the system, as LPAs currently do not have a system in place for abandoned sites. The information gathering is primarily completed for the bonding committee.

##### 3. Biotoxin Committee (S. Zimmerman) – Update

Committee member Steve Zimmerman provided an update that the Biotoxin Committee is primarily done with their work. Mr. Lambert suggested that work plan Number 3 (Biotoxin Committee) can be removed from the work plan and asked committee for any ideas on new work plan ideas.

##### 4. Site Marking Committee (G. Lambert)

Mr. Lambert gave an update on the Site Markings committee, who have met twice. The first meetings are information gathering, having also met with the U.S. Coast Guard, and recommendations are currently being generated. Identified marking issues include winter marking, non-active site markings, required location of markers, enforcement of marker locations, what tools are being used for locations, colors and labeling of corner buoys, PATON exemptions, color of interior buoys, marking gear individually, and markings for nurseries.

#### **Inactive**

## 1. LPA Combination Committee (M. Moretti)

Committee member Matt Moretti asked about activating the LPA Combination Workplan Committee. Dr. Ellis stated that there are two existing committees (upweller and amendments) that will be reactivated to assist with the development of regulations and would require additional time from committee members. Mr. Lambert stated that the committee can reorganize if needed and suggested continuing to move forward with the bonding and site marking committees.

Industry input - **Greg Lambert**

**10:54-10:54**

No industry input provided.

Public input - **Greg Lambert**

**10:54-11:01**

Industry member Willy Leathers proposed finding a cost support system for industry members to attend shellfish and algae conferences in Maine. Ms. Kanwit stated that these conferences typically provide grants or reduced fee opportunities to encourage more attendance at these conferences.

### **Upcoming Events**

**11:02-11:06**

- Maine Aquaculture Innovation Center Speaker Series with DMR:
  - o May 14<sup>th</sup> at 4pm – Laws and Regulations
  - o June 4<sup>th</sup> at 4pm – Compliance or Else
  - o June 18<sup>th</sup> at 4pm – I hate DMR, now what?
- Seaweed Week – April 24<sup>th</sup> through May 3<sup>rd</sup>
- Vibrio Season June 1<sup>st</sup> through Oct 15<sup>th</sup>
- Maine Oyster Festival June 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>

Schedule the next meeting - **Greg Lambert**

**11:06-11:14**

July 29<sup>th</sup> at 3-5pm

September 30<sup>th</sup> 9-12pm

Adjourn

**11:15**

Lauren Gray motioned, Will Owen seconded.