

# Sea Urchin Zone Council Meeting Minutes

**December 8, 2025, in Augusta, ME. Remote - Hybrid Meeting Option**

**DMR Staff:** Jen Harris, Lulu Bates and Deirdre Gilbert.

**SUZC Members Present:** Mark Nickerson, Clint Richardson, Steve Eddy, Joe Leask; Present remotely: Luke Meyers, Justin Gebo, Teresa Johnson, Frank Peasley, Sinuon Chau, Larry Harris, Steve Bechard, Tim Peterson.

**SUZC Members Absent:** Brian Preney, Tracey Sawtelle, Alan Knowlton.

**AUDIENCE:** Jamie Header; present remotely: Chandler Sendek (UMaine), Takashi Matsumoto (MCube LLC), Atchan Tamaki (ISF), Dana Morse, Trey Angera, Nicholas Simonenko, Aaron (tender zone 2).

**Meeting commenced at 3:00pm**

Quorum achieved

## **Welcome and Introductions**

Clint Richardson (Vice Chair) called the meeting to order and asked that we introduce ourselves.

## **Minutes from July 10, 2025, SUZC Meeting**

**Motion:** Joe Leask/ Mark Nickerson

C. Richardson requested comments or edits to the July 10, 2025, draft meeting minutes. There were no comments. A request for a motion to approve was put forward. Move to accept minutes was unanimous.

## **Flex Harvest Option Industry Updates**

Jen Harris asked everyone how the Flexible Harvest Option had been working this season for harvesters. J. Harris also presented a draft of a Flexible Harvest Guide from DMR, explaining components of the option, with plans to post a final version of the guide to the DMR website shortly after the meeting. The guide clarified questions that had been brought up by harvesters, into a digestible and easily accessible format. J. Leask explained issues he was having entering “No Sale,” into the VESL application, and the group discussed using the CARRED option instead (described in the guide). J. Leask also stated that early season harvesters had utilized the flexible harvest option the most, because buyers were going Downeast in late-season with vehicles, but not in early-season. Early-season harvesters frequently had to truck urchins to Portland themselves. Tim Peterson inquired if harvesters utilizing the flexible harvest option could leave their previous days harvest on board. Everyone discussed how this was not possible and language in the guide stated this as well. Sinuon Chau asked if a fisherman was utilizing the flexible harvest option, was it legal to put urchin totes in the water to keep them cold? J. Harris responded the guidance in the document was to keep the temperature between 32 – 35 Degrees Fahrenheit. Jamie Header inquired if when using the flexible harvest option, tags had to be put on totes by a certain time after being landed. The group discussed that totes should be tagged by the end of the day they were harvested.

## **DMR Science Update**

Lulu Bates summarized the results of the Sea Urchin Forum held in September 2025. The meeting included researchers, managers, aqua culturists, representatives from Canada’s Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), and industry members, with participation both in person and remotely. The forum featured multiple presentations, discussions, and collaborative sessions focused on identifying priorities for the urchin stock and potential research initiatives. Lulu noted that she would like to make the forum an

annual event and hopes to increase industry participation in future meetings. She also shared the 2025 dive survey report, which will be posted on the DMR website. The survey data highlighted trends in urchin biomass as well as other species monitored by DMR during surveys. It was discussed that no management measures for the upcoming urchin season would be based on dive survey results. However, the findings will help inform discussions of future research priorities and potential projects moving forward.

### **Update from DMR Policy and Science**

J. Harris explained that a poll would be sent to the urchin industry and questions within the poll would focus on the future of the fishery. This topic was brought up at the last urchin meeting in July with Commissioner Wilson. J. Harris explained there would be different polls for scientists, harvesters, buyers and processors. It would most likely be sent via email and would be mailed to members of the industry. After discussion, it was clarified that the poll wouldn't be rushed and would be distributed after the urchin season calendar-setting meeting, potentially in May or June. It was also suggested that the poll should be primarily targeted towards active divers. The group discussed when the season setting meeting would be, and that it is normally in late April. J. Harris discussed that no immediate management decisions would be made based on the results of the poll, and that if there were changes that industry would have plenty of notice and discussion. It was also mentioned that results of the poll could be a topic of discussion at the next Sea Urchin Forum in September. L. Bates and J. Harris explained that they were conducting urchin interviews at processor trucks during the 2025-2026 season (aka port-sampling). Their hope was to be out every two weeks for the urchin season. They had already sampled in Whiting Corner once.

### **FOAA Information for Councils – New Requirement**

J. Harris explained that the Maine Legislature amended Maine's existing Freedom of Access Act (FOAA) by requiring all members of state boards/commissions to complete a FOAA training. The amended statute (1 M.R.S. §412), moving forward shall apply to all boards/commissions established under Title 5, Chapter 379; including the Sea Urchin Zone Council (SUZC). The law allows board members to complete the training through self-study, conducting a thorough review of all information made available by the state on a publicly accessible website, or by attending a training course with the same information. Council members could conduct the self-study with the materials J. Harris had given them prior to the meeting. J. Harris described a few highlights of the requirements then asked that once the training was completed, each member of the SUZC send her a signed completion certificate by January 22, 2026. In addition, any new council members would need to complete the training within 120 days of being elected or appointed.

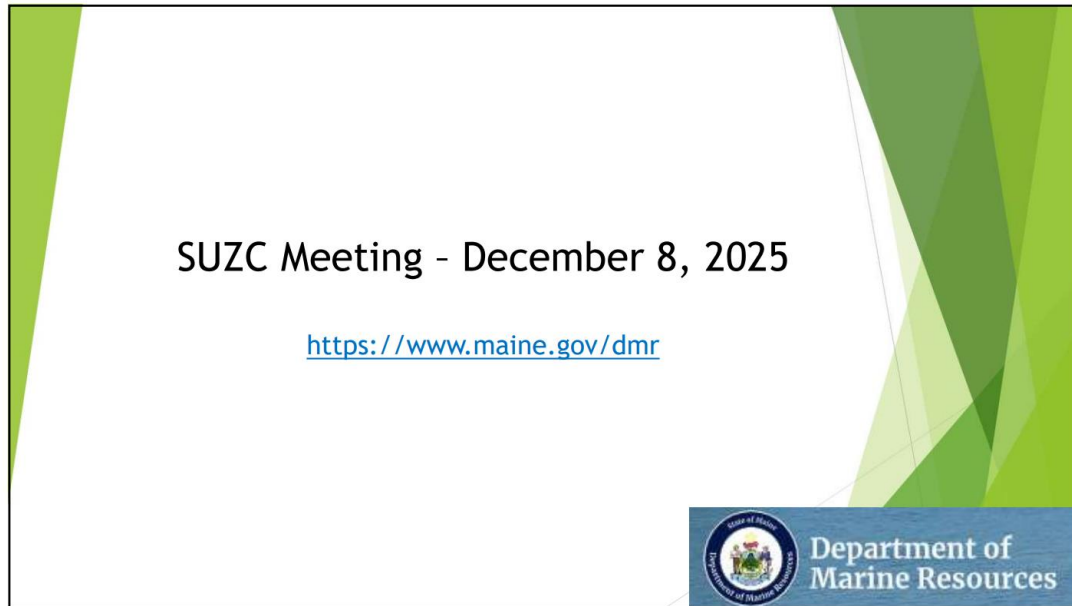
### **Other Business**

J. Leask inquired how the season was going, based on L. Bates's surveys. L. Bates explained the season had more activity than expected in December, and this year on the dive survey they saw more urchin seed than previous years. L. Bates would like people to let her know if they had seen this uptick as well. She was taking it as a good sign and had heard from recreational divers they were seeing a lot of seed along the coast. If harvesters would like to let L. Bates know, the location information would be confidential. J. Harris and L. Bates would also be conducting a few more port sampling trips and hoped to have more harvester participation.

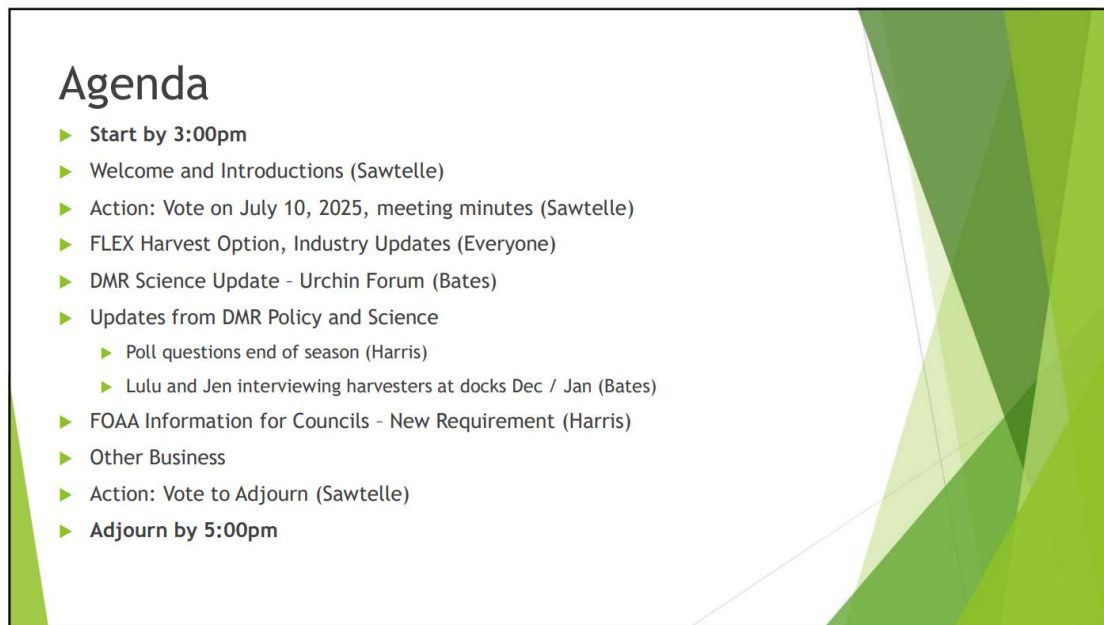
### **Motion to Adjourn: Motion:** J. Leask/M. Nickerson

C. Richardson requested to adjourn. A motion was put forward. The meeting was adjourned at 3:54pm. Response unanimous.

## Slideshow Presentation DMR:



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## Draft Meeting Minutes (Vote)(Sawtelle)

- ▶ Draft Minutes from July 10, 2025, meeting - Voted on by council members

## Flex Harvest Option - Updates (Everyone)

## Flex Harvest Guide - Will go on website (Harris)

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### Green Sea Urchin Flexible Harvest Guidance

This document provides guidance for Green Sea Urchin harvesters who choose to utilize the Maine Department of Marine Resources (DMR) Flexible Harvest Option to carry over product (i.e. CARRED totes) until a sale transaction occurs. The Flexible Harvest option was created in the 2024 DMR rulemaking cycle of [Chapter 26 \(Sections 26.12, 26.4 and 26.5\)](#). Please send any questions regarding these guidelines to Jen Harris, Marine Resource Management Coordinator ([Jennifer.harris@maine.gov](mailto:Jennifer.harris@maine.gov) or 207-458-9234). Urchin science questions may sent to Lulu Bates ([Elija.D.Bates@maine.gov](mailto:Elija.D.Bates@maine.gov)). Harvest questions may also be directed to your local [Marine Patrol Officer](#).

1. **The tote limit per zone per day HAS NOT CHANGED utilizing this option.** Sea Urchin harvesters shall only fish for, take, possess at sea, or land no more than nine (in Zone 1) or six (in Zone 2) standard size stackable fish totes per day. Harvesters remain responsible for tracking their fishing days per zone. **This remains 15 days in Zone 1 and 30 days in Zone 2** (DMR Chapter 26.4).
2. A harvester may possess the number of totes equal to the daily limit multiplied by the number of open harvest days in which the license holder is authorized and elects to fish that calendar week (Monday – Friday) (DMR Chapter 26.4).
3. A harvester **must SELL all product by Friday**. No totes may be carried over to the following week (DMR Chapter 26.4).
4. A harvester must **tag their own totes with the harvest date and their harvester license number** and hold their daily catch in cold storage (DMR Chapter 26.12).
5. **A harvester MUST report their daily trip electronically through either LEEDS or VESL.** Federal vessels may use Fish Online (FOL) or eTRIPS. One use of an urchin fob no longer equates to one fishing day (DMR Chapter 26.5).
  - a. Rather than using "NO SALE" in your report, use "CARRED" and report the intended dealer. This will complete the trip report. If the dealer changes, the trip report will require an edit.
  - b. When reporting weight, please use the information you have based on your prior years' fishing to estimate your typical tote weight. Actual weight will be provided by the dealer when you sell. The dealer-provided total weight should match the sum of the fishermen's daily tote calculations plus any additional weight sold that day.
  - c. Landings Program staff are available to help set up favorite settings electronically (Landings Program assistance: 207-633-9414). If you have concerns related to your urchin fob, please contact the Landings Program for assistance.
6. Processors suggest totes be kept between 32 – 35 Degrees Fahrenheit temperature, to maintain the quality of the urchins for purchase.

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## DMR Science Forum - Bates

- Yearly event in September
- Bringing together researchers, managers, aqua culturists, industry members, DFO scientists
- Working together to identify research priorities and get research projects started

## Updates from Policy and Science

- Harris - End of Season Poll
- Bates - At the Dock Interviews

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## Public Officials and Public Records

You are now a part  
of Maine's history!

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## Freedom of Access Act(FOAA)

- ▶ Maine's Freedom of Access Act (FOAA) requires that State agencies make available to the public or media any government records that are requested, unless specifically exempted by the Statute due to privacy concerns.
- ▶ Making records available depends upon properly retaining and preserving them.

See: [www.maine.gov/foaa/](http://www.maine.gov/foaa/)

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## What is a record?

- ▶ Books, papers, photographs, maps or other documentation regardless of their physical forms or characteristics (including digital records such as e-mail messages and attachments - no matter how technology may change or advance)
- ▶ Made or received in connection with the transaction of official government business
- ▶ Maintained because they serve as evidence of the agency's functions, policies, decision, procedures, operations and other activities; or because of their informational value

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## FOAA Process

- ▶ Requests are submitted to the Public Access Officer (for DMR, Charlene Beringer)
- ▶ Requests are acknowledged within 5 business days.
- ▶ Requests are fulfilled “within a reasonable period of time”

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## Public Proceedings

- ▶ The term "public proceeding" means "the transactions of any functions affecting any or all citizens of the State" by the Maine Legislature and its committees and subcommittees; any board or commission of a state agency or authority including the University of Maine and the Maine Community College System; any board, commission, agency or authority of any county, municipality, school district or any regional or other political or administrative subdivision; the full membership meetings of any association, the membership of which is comprised exclusively of counties, municipalities, school districts, other political or administrative subdivisions, or their boards, commissions, agencies or authorities; and any advisory organization established, authorized or organized by law, resolve or executive order.

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## Public Proceeding Requirements

- ▶ The FOAA requires all public proceedings to be open to the public and any person must be permitted to attend.
- ▶ Public notice is required of all public proceedings if the proceedings are a meeting of a body or agency consisting of 3 or more persons.

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## Use of Email

- ▶ Members of a body should refrain from the use of e-mail as a substitute for deliberating or deciding substantive matters properly confined to public proceedings. E-mail is permissible to communicate with other members about non-substantive matters such as scheduling meetings, developing agendas and disseminating information and reports.

## Emails as Public Record

- ▶ Even when sent or received using a member's personal computer or e-mail account, e-mail may be considered a public record. [1 M.R.S. § 402\(3\)](#) As a result, members of a body should be aware that all e-mails and e-mail attachments relating to the member's participation are likely public records subject to public inspection under the FOAA.

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## Next Steps

- ▶ **Complete “Self Study” Requirement** by reading the information at the links that Jen provided.
- ▶ **Complete the form, and submit it to Jen.** It can be emailed or mailed.
- ▶ **Deadline: January 22, 2026**
- ▶ **As new members join, they will also take these steps within 120 days of their appointments.**

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## Other Business (Sawtelle)

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