

**TESTIMONY OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE**

**BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON INLAND FISHERIES
AND WILDLIFE**

In Opposition to L.D. 971

“An Act to Repeal the Law Regarding Checking Baitfish Traps”

Presented by: Representative STROUT of Harrington.

Cosponsored by: Senator MOORE of Washington and Representatives: HEPLER of Woolwich, MASON of Lisbon, THORNE of Carmel, TUELL of East Machias, WOOD of Greene.

DATE OF HEARING: March 24, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Liz Latti, Fisheries and Hatcheries Director at the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (IFW), speaking on behalf of the Department in opposition to L.D. 971.

This bill repeals the law that requires a person, while trapping baitfish in inland waters of the State with the use of a baitfish trap, to check the baitfish trap or cause the trap to be checked at least once in every 7 days.

Baitfish traps are baited devices used by both recreational and commercial harvesters intended to attract and capture baitfish species, such as shiners or dace, to be used or sold as baitfish for recreational fishing. The current law, (Title 12 Section 12555) which passed in 2003 requires both commercial and recreational harvesters to check baitfish traps at least once every 7 days. Requiring regular tending of baited traps creates the opportunity to release any captured fish. It is not uncommon to inadvertently attract and capture non-target species, including sportfish from both wild and stocked populations, such as brook trout, smallmouth bass, white perch, and landlocked salmon.

The proposed bill to repeal the requirement for tending baitfish traps would lead to unnecessary stress and potential mortality for all captured fish. Furthermore, it could result in an increase in abandoned bait traps, contributing to litter in public waterways. This bill would also eliminate a key enforcement mechanism, limiting the ability of law enforcement to ensure the safe harvest and responsible use of public resources. The current tending requirements allow for timely compliance checks by the Warden Service, enabling them to address any issues and ensure the proper use of these resources.

In summary, the current law allows harvesters to tend baitfish traps within a one-week period, providing fair flexibility. The Department believes that removing this requirement would lead to unintended biological concerns and undermine law enforcement’s ability to ensure compliance and proper management of public resources.

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