



**Testimony of Rob Snyder, President, Island Institute
Submitted to the**

**U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources
November 2, 2017**

Chairman Lamborn, ranking member Huffman, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Rob Snyder and I'm the President of the Island Institute, a community development organization based in Rockland, Maine. The Island Institute cares deeply about working waterfronts. As an organization, we work to sustain Maine's island and coastal communities and exchange ideas and experiences to further the sustainability of communities in Maine and elsewhere. I have spent the last 17 years helping coastal businesses and communities overcome significant challenges and take advantage of opportunities to improve their working waterfront infrastructure.

Just three of Maine's communities - Rockland, Vinalhaven, and Stonington - landed about \$114 million worth of lobster in 2015, almost equal to the value of all of the commercial fisheries in New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Connecticut, combined. Every one of the 270,000 fishing trips Maine lobstermen take each year starts at a working waterfront and every pound of the 130 million pounds of lobster that fishermen land, crosses a working waterfront on its way to markets around the globe.

In fact, the American lobster, is the single most valuable species landed in the entire U.S. and 80% of that catch comes from Maine. Last year, the lobsters landed by Maine lobstermen were valued at over \$533 million. Nationally, fishermen landed \$5.2 billion worth of fish – which means the lobster industry in Maine is responsible for about 10% of total value of commercial landings in the country.

In Maine, our working waterfront infrastructure and the businesses that they rely

on face a variety of threats from shifts in the economy, government policy and environment. For fish and aquaculture products, the ability to access markets, and especially international markets, plays an important role in the health of coastal communities. Trade with Canada, Europe, and China as well as the strength of the dollar, all have a direct bearing on the viability of businesses that need a working waterfront.

Unseasonably warm waters in 2012 shifted the timing of the lobster shed and lobsters shed their shells 6 weeks early. The early shed led to a significant and unanticipated increase in landings before the processors were ready to handle the increased product flow. The price tanked, and fishing businesses struggled to make loan payments or pay their crews.

Storm surge has the potential to structurally change the communities and economy of our coast. Direct wave action or elevated water levels in a protected cove can easily cause significant damage to the infrastructure that supports fishing. From floating docks to bait coolers and fuel tanks, there is a lot of important and expensive infrastructure along the coast, and constraints placed on financing properties in the flood zone exacerbate these issues. Fishermen need these places that provide a connection between land and ocean. They are the quintessential “water-dependent, coastal related businesses.”

While the Island Institute is based in Maine and cares deeply about communities in Maine, we know that communities across the country are working on ideas and innovations that might help Maine’s communities. Through years of exchanging shared challenges, and solutions with fishermen and community leaders from Alaska, California, Louisiana, Florida, North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, and elsewhere, we have found an incredible commitment to supporting local working waterfronts. Because of their importance to local economies, and in many cases to the local identity, working waterfront conversations attract a wide range of stakeholders.

Even at the national level, the issues facing our nation’s working waterfronts attract a diverse group of stakeholders. The National Working Waterfront Network brings together a variety of stakeholders from every coastal state that includes businesses, industry associations, community leaders, government

agencies, and others to help address shared challenges.

One underlying theme from across the country is that our nation's working waterfronts are only as strong as the businesses they support. If the underlying business is struggling, the working waterfront falls into disrepair. Even if a working waterfront hosts a strong business, its prime location on the water may make it highly desirable. Skyrocketing coastal property values, and increasing tax burdens can put pressure on the owners to turn the property into condos or another high value use.

Estimates from 2009 suggest that ocean-based economic activity represents 3.4 percent of total US GDP and 4.8 percent of total US employment – in 2009, there were over 130,000 business paying almost 2.4 million employees over \$84 billion in wages and benefits. Much of this activity is associated with a working waterfront. **I would suggest that Congressional leaders are not paying enough attention to the specific needs of small, water-dependent coastal businesses and we should be asking questions about how we could be supporting and fostering innovation on working waterfronts.**

At their core, each working waterfront represents a local economic and land use issue, but across the country, each of these working waterfronts ends up facing many similar challenges. Whether it is a small family owned marina in Florida, larger port infrastructure in Washington, open access to facilities in California, or dredging the channels in the Great Lakes, the challenges facing working waterfronts have a federal connection and federal agencies are already involved in working waterfront businesses. **This raises questions about how federal agencies consider working waterfronts when they are awarding grants, promulgating regulations, or making permitting decisions.**

In addition to helping start a conversation about the issues above, HR 1176 directly addresses a conclusion reached in a report that the National Working Waterfront Network produced for the U.S. Economic Development Administration. The report found that there are very few federal programs specifically available for working waterfronts and for those that are available, working waterfronts are an “allowable use of funds” rather than a “primary use of funds.” The report concluded that for these programs, “lack of specificity makes them ineffective in addressing the drivers of change that threaten working

waterfronts.”

Investing in our nation’s working waterfront businesses, makes an investment at the center of economic activity for our coasts. Supporting these places and ensuring their long term viability as working waterfront infrastructure provides a connection that goes well beyond the bounds of the specific waterfront business. The benefits of these investments will flow to the broader community, and particularly in rural areas, will allow us to maximize the benefit from ocean resources and enhance the strength of our coastal communities.

Thank you for your time.

Appendices and attachments:

- Island Institute – Waypoints - <http://www.islandinstitute.org/waypoints>
- Island Institute – Lobsters and Ocean Planning - <http://www.islandinstitute.org/resource/lobster-and-ocean-planning>
- Island Institute – Last 20 Miles - <http://www.islandinstitute.org/resource/last-20-miles>
- Sustainable Working Waterfront Toolkit - http://www.wateraccessus.com/docs/report/EDA_FinalReport.pdf
- 2015 Fisheries of the United States, NOAA - <https://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/Assets/commercial/fus/fus15/documents/FUS2015.pdf>
- National Working Waterfronts and Waterways 2015 Symposium Report - <http://www.wateraccessus.com/docs/symposia/senseofthesymposium2015.pdf>
- National Working Waterfront and Waterways 2013 Symposium Report - http://depts.washington.edu/wwater13/Sense-of-the-Symposium_Ir.pdf
- National Working Waterfronts and Waterways 2010 Symposium Report - <http://www.wateraccessus.com/docs/symposia/senseofthesymposium2010.pdf>
- National Working Waterfronts and Waterways 2007 Symposium Report - <http://www.wateraccessus.com/docs/symposia/senseofthesymposium2007.pdf>