

Liam Cromie, Point Judith Green Crabs

Written Testimony in Support of Senate Bill No. 938

May 7, 2025

My name is Liam Cromie. I am a seventeen-year-old commercial green crab fisherman and high-school student, and I strongly support Senate Bill No. 938 that would establish an affordable green crab-only commercial fishing license. This bill would make a real difference not only for my small business, but for a growing, ecologically-minded green crab fishery and seafood industry in Rhode Island. Since I was 3 years old, I've been wading in the waters of Point Judith Pond during the summer, searching for clams, minnows, mummichogs, mussels and crabs. While clams, small fish, and native blue crabs can be hard to find, there is one species that is ominously ever-present: the European Green Crab. This invasive crab species is abundant and aggressive. They have out-competed many of the native crab species, destroyed eelgrass habitats which serve as nurseries for native marine species, negatively and significantly impacting the shellfish industry all up and down the East coast. A single green crab can eat as many as 40 young quahogs, oysters, or soft-shell clams in a day. They have the potential to devastate entire oyster farms.

At 13, I realized I could create a summer job for myself while also reducing the green crab population by selling green crabs to my local marina and bait shop. Without a commercial license, however, I was turned away. I went home and researched the requirements, found the proper license, then waited for the window to acquire the license from the DEM the following winter. The license currently required is titled a Resident Standard Fishing License with a Limited Crustacean Endorsement, which has a \$150 annual fee and permits the fishing of all non-lobster crustacean species, including the high-value native species in need of protection and

regulation. An additional \$25 annual vessel endorsement is needed in order to use a boat while harvesting.

To even begin business, I needed the license, traps, and other equipment. Green crabs have a low market value, especially when they're only being used as bait. That first summer, I sold 3 bushels, and with about 300 crabs in each bushel, I removed approximately 900 green crabs from the pond. I sold each bushel for \$40, which didn't even cover the cost of the annual license. Please know that green crabs are so abundant and dominant that even if I had wanted to sell any of the more valuable species that my license covered, I only accidentally caught a single blue crab in my traps the entire summer - which I released. If not for the strong belief that I was doing a good thing by removing the invasive crabs from the pond, I probably wouldn't have bought the license again for the next summer.

In the summer of 2024, the Rhode Island fishing season for Tautog was newly restricted, and all of a sudden my marina didn't want to buy green crabs any more. After calling various bait shops around the state and getting told by one bait dealer that "no one in the state of Rhode Island wants to buy green crabs right now", I had to pivot to try to make use of the license I had already paid for. That's when I reached out to a local organization called Eating With the Ecosystem and got connected to chefs in Rhode Island who were looking to use green crabs in their menus. I learned that to sell crabs to a restaurant, an additional \$50 seafood dealer's license is required, so I purchased that as well. Much to my surprise, the number of chefs interested was staggering. Within a week of contacting Eating With the Ecosystem, I had been connected with 8 different chefs who were all ready to purchase bushels of crabs from me. For the rest of the summer, I worked my traps for hours every day, filling them with fresh bait one day only to pull them up the next, full of green crabs in place of the bait. I was routinely filling up every single

trap I had, operating at maximum capacity for the months of the summer, and I was still only able to meet the requests of two chefs, who would clear me out entirely every week. This last summer, I was able to sell over 10 bushels (around 3,000 crabs) to chefs, demonstrating that the supply is in the water and the demand is there. What we need now to develop the Rhode Island green crab industry is to get more harvesters out there to bridge the gap of ocean to table.

There are so many green crabs in our waters, something that I've experienced and that data suggests. A single female green crab can lay up to 185,000 eggs annually, allowing the green crab population to grow rapidly. Beyond that, green crabs can thrive in a wide range of temperatures, salinity, and other conditions, shown by their native range that extends from Northern Africa all the way to the Northern tip of Norway in the Arctic Circle. By harvesting them, we can help manage their population and protect our ecosystem, while supplying the restaurant industry with high quality yet inexpensive seafood for consumers.

Other states, like Maine and Massachusetts, that have also been inundated with green crabs have already created green crab only commercial licenses or permits for residents at a low cost. Rhode Island, the Ocean State, ought to be leading, not lagging, when it comes to fisheries policy, supporting commercial fishermen and encouraging sustainable seafood. By passing this bill, Rhode Island will demonstrate the desire to cultivate an accessible and affordable new fishery. This bill will not negatively impact current commercial fishermen - the Limited Crustacean License will continue to cover green crabs just as the Unlimited Crustacean License, (the license required for lobster fishermen), covers all other crustacean species as well. Commercial fishermen who sell a variety of species can continue to sell green crabs with no additional licensing fees. This bill establishes an affordable, entry level green crab-only

commercial fishing license readily available for those who have a desire to enter a low-cost, low-competition market with an abundant population of the target species.

One suggestion I have to amend the bill would be to make sure the language is clear that recreational green crab harvesting remains free and without added regulations, as green crabs are a harmful invasive species. Recreational harvesting of green crabs is common among fishermen who use them as bait and for their own food, and recreational harvesters play a critical role in helping reduce the invasive population. I am concerned that adding requirements and regulations for recreational green crab harvesters could create opposition and disrupt the main, important, purpose of the bill.

This bill has my support. I believe that it will boost the green crab industry: make it easier for people in Rhode Island to enter the market as harvesters, generate more supply for restaurants in Rhode Island to utilize, and provide more affordable, delicious seafood for Rhode Island consumers.

Since I began commercially harvesting green crabs, I've spent \$600 in three years on licensing alone. Selling only green crabs, it's hard to bounce back from such a substantial annual expense. It's not like other fisheries, where the license cost is proportional to the value of the species. The high license fee is a barrier to entry to an industry that has already built a lot of demand in the restaurants of the state. With the current license, however, there's little incentive to join a low-value market burdened by high-cost licenses. There are plenty of green crabs in the water for the taking, and they're doing serious damage to our ecosystem and other, more valuable, fisheries. There's plenty of demand from chefs, who love to use green crabs as a delicious yet inexpensive seafood ingredient, using them in broths, butters, sauces, and more. All that is needed to really support and build the industry is more harvesters to connect the ample

supply and demand. By creating this affordable green crab only license, the door is opened for enthusiastic, small-scale harvesters to go out there and get experience in the fishing and seafood industries while doing good for the ecosystem.

I've spent my summers pulling thousands of invasive crabs from our waters - not because I earn much money, but because it matters. This bill ensures ensures that new, local green crab harvesters like me won't be priced out of making a real difference - for a growing seafood market in the Rhode Island economy and for our ecosystem.

## Green Crab License Comparison

|   | <u>Rhode Island</u>        | <u>Massachusetts</u> | <u>Maine</u>    |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Commercial License</b>                 | Limited Crustacean License | Green Crab Only      | Green Crab Only |
| <b>Annual License Fee</b>                 | \$150.00                   | \$0.00               | \$10.00         |
| <b>Annual Dealer Fee</b>                  | 50.00                      | 65.00                | 50.00           |
| <b>Annual Vessel endorsement</b>          | 25.00                      | 0.00                 | 0.00            |
| <b>Annual Licensing Cost Total</b>        | \$225.00                   | \$65.00              | \$60.00         |
| <b>Cost relative to RI</b>                |                            | 28.89%               | 26.67%          |
|   |                            |                      |                 |
| <b>Price Per Bushel (restaurant)</b>      | \$60.00                    | \$60.00              | \$60.00         |
|   |                            |                      |                 |
| <b>Fuel cost estimate per bushel</b>      | \$3.00                     | \$3.00               | \$3.00          |
| <b>Bait cost estimate per bushel</b>      | 3.00                       | 3.00                 | 3.00            |
| <b>Expenses estimate per bushel</b>       | \$6.00                     | \$6.00               | \$6.00          |
|   |                            |                      |                 |
| <b>Margin per bushel</b>                  | \$54.00                    | \$54.00              | \$54.00         |
| <b>Bushel Yield per trap per week</b>     | 0.20                       | 0.20                 | 0.20            |
| <b># of Bushels to breakeven</b>          | 4.17                       | 1.20                 | 1.11            |
|   |                            |                      |                 |
| <b>Weeks to breakeven with one trap</b>   | 20.83                      | 6.02                 | 5.56            |
| <b>Summers to breakeven with one trap</b> | 1.74                       | 0.50                 | 0.46            |