

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1902

June 21, 2016

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Majority Leader of the House of Representatives
H-107 United States Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Majority Leader McCarthy,

I write to urge you to bring H.R. 4245 to the House floor for a vote as soon as possible. This bipartisan legislation would exempt certain echinoderms, including sea urchins and sea cucumber, from licensing requirements under the Endangered Species Act. This common sense bill would remove unnecessary and overly burdensome federal regulation from harmless species of sea life, whose inclusion in the inspection regime has no basis in science and whose domestic harvesting is thoroughly regulated at the state level. This bill passed out of the House Natural Resources Committee by voice vote on June 15, 2016.

The Maine sea urchin and sea cucumber industry employs more than 650 hardworking Mainers and is a vital component to Maine's coastal economy. Many of these harvesters are often individuals who supplement their lobstering or other fishing income in the off season with urchin diving—a dangerous and expensive activity whose great risk yields considerable rewards.

These highly perishable products have a shelf life of just seven days, during which time the creatures need to arrive at the processing facility from port, be processed, shipped to and arrive at their ultimate destination (typically Asia). This high turnaround time leaves virtually no time for delays that result from overly burdensome mandatory federal inspections.

Until 2011, the industry was able to export processed product to Asia free from any federal regulatory burdens, aside from the standard customs process because sea urchins and sea cucumbers were considered to fall under a longstanding exemption from those regulations.

In 2011, the Fish and Wildlife Service began to require processors to submit to certain regulations they had never been required to follow before, including obtaining a federal import/export license, submitting to inspections after providing a minimum of 48 hours' notice to the FWS, and paying fees that can total hundreds of dollars. Additionally, the FWS has requested past records from some processors and is seeking to collect payments and penalties retroactive to 2011, which would total thousands of dollars and potentially put many processors, and in turn harvesters, out of business.

This bill simply corrects this error and permits sea urchins, sea cucumbers and other echinoderms to be included in the exemption described above. It is common sense so that this industry can survive and continue to provide good paying jobs to hardworking Mainers.

Again, I urge you to bring H.R. 4245 the House floor. On behalf of the hardworking Maine sea urchin and sea cucumber harvesters and processors, I thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Bruce Poliquin
Member of Congress