My name is Joseph Leask. I am the Chairman of the State of Maine Sea Urchin Zone Council. I have been a sea urchin diver for 25 years. I am also a cucumber diver. I have at times been the common pool representative to The New England Management Fisheries Council. I am the Captain and owner of the fishing vessel, November Gale, a trawler from Portland, Maine. I have trawled for twenty years. I also own Misty Morning Cottages, year round vacation rentals right on the shores of Moosehead Lake.

In my position as Chairman of the state of Maine Sea Urchin Zone Council, I chair the council which works closely with the state of Maine, Department of Marine Resources to regulate our industry. We set seasons, promote safety, work to increase biomass, while preparing for the addition of new entrants to the fishery.

The sea urchin and sea cucumber industry has been stable and slowly growing. The sea urchin biomass is growing, an experimental sea cucumber harvest has been implemented and our domestic market has grown greatly. In the near future there will be new jobs added in this industry. The State of Maine Sea Urchin Zone Council and DMR are currently preparing for these new entrants.

In recent years we have implemented strict catch limits. Log books for both harvesters and buyers are mandatory. These catch reports must be filed with the state of Maine before urchin harvesting licenses are renewed. Strict monitoring is kept by the State of Maine Department of Marine Resources.

Recently an item of great concern has increasingly affected sea urchin and sea cucumber harvesting. Our American caught product competes globally. The Department of Inland Fish and Wildlife now inspects all shipments of sea urchins and cucumbers from this country. This process hinders shipments. The highly perishable seafood depend on immediate shipment for best quality. Any delay sending these fresh seafood products from New York to Japan is costly and potentially harmful to consumers. In addition these inspection costs are passed on to harvesters and buyers alike. This results in lower wages for state of Maine fisherman and lower profits for small businesses. In some cases it could jeopardize market position resulting in the loss of that market to foreign competition as well as the loss of jobs.