



Mount Desert Island
Biological Laboratory

P.O. Box 35 159 Old Bar Harbor Road
Salisbury Cove, ME 04672
Main tel: 207-288-3605
fax: 207-288-2130
website: www.mdibl.org

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Dear Kohl Kanwit:

The Frenchman Bay Partners is a consortium of groups and individuals interested in working together toward a healthy and sustainable future for Frenchman Bay, where multiple users can enjoy the inherent beauty and benefit from the ecological and economic viability of the bay. We provide means by which local stakeholders can come together to address issues in a way that does not require top-down intervention or legislative action. As a part of the project initiation process, the Frenchman Bay Partners has served as a collaborative capacity builder for informal local conservation agreements amongst stakeholders in Frenchman Bay. In line with the vision of the Frenchman Bay Partners, we want people to be able to benefit from the resources of Frenchman Bay successfully, safely, and sustainably.

We would like to take this opportunity to address the recent Department of Marine Resources Biotoxin Management Program proposal. After seeing the proposed changes, we had several initial concerns, as upper Frenchman Bay is not generally prone to prolonged biotoxin closures and we might assume that this area will be less heavily affected by the proposed closures than other areas in the state:

1. Eliminating harvesting possibilities from offshore areas might increase harvesting pressure or habitat disturbance in upper Frenchman Bay, both for mussels and for other species affected by increased or indiscriminate harvesting.
2. New mussel harvesters coming to the bay may be unaware of our agreement with local mussel harvesters (see attached map) regarding our eelgrass restoration areas and "donor sites," as well as our efforts to reduce conflict among local commercial harvesters through effective communication.
3. There is potential for negative impact of the closures on public perceptions of seafood safety and possible market effects related to those perceptions.


Our concerns are a reflection of the impacts from increased harvesting experienced in Frenchman Bay during the widespread PSP closures in 2005 and 2009. This additional harvesting activity resulted in a serious impact on eelgrass beds and shellfish resources. Since then, we have worked with local mussel harvesters to craft agreements regarding dragging in areas where we would like to restore eelgrass. We find that as we learn more about the proposed changes to the Biotoxin Management Program, our concerns have been somewhat alleviated. We believe that communication between the DMR and harvesters has never been better. After some discussion with key stakeholders, we now expect that the number of outside harvesters coming into the bay will be minimal. In addition, we see potential advantages in concentrating monitoring effort and hope that frequent and focused sampling will lead to healthy bays being reopened sooner for harvesting.

While we do not anticipate that the proposed changes will negatively impact local harvesters or ongoing collaborative efforts here in Frenchman Bay, we believe that successful communication of our agreements with mussel harvesters is crucial for the continued collaborative work among a diverse set of partners in Frenchman Bay. In order to protect our local agreements, we would like the DMR to be aware of our collaborative capacity building efforts and we would like to engage non-local resource users in our

communication loop, possibly through the help of the DMR, as well as local seafood dealers and processors. We believe communication and mutually beneficial bay resource agreements are inextricably linked.

The Frenchman Bay Partners would like to continue to act as a platform for communication in light of the recent proposal and we would be more than willing to share what we are learning about how to facilitate conversation and effectively address conflict between different resource user groups. We would like to help support collaborative relationships in any way we can. For more information, please contact Bridie McGreavy at bridie.mcgreavy@maine.edu.

Sincerely,



President, Frenchman Bay Partners

Chris Petersen,
College of the Atlantic
Vice president, Frenchman Bay Partners

Bridie McGreavy,
Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center at University of Maine
Secretary, Frenchman Bay Partners

Bob DeForrest,
Maine Coast Heritage Trust
Executive Officer at Large, Frenchman Bay Partners

Fiona de Koning,
Acadia Aqua Farms
Executive Officer at Large, Frenchman Bay Partners