

Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee

Joshua Schauer 271-3077

HB 1833-FN, creating a special license for non-resident vessel operators participating in tuna tournaments.

Hearing Date: April 2, 2026

Time Opened: 9:23 a.m.

Time Closed: 9:36 a.m.

Members of the Committee Present: Senators Avard, Pearl, McConkey, Watters and Rosenwald

Members of the Committee Absent : None

Bill Analysis: This bill creates a special license for non-resident vessel operators participating in tuna tournaments.

Sponsors:

Rep. Bridle

Rep. Bernardy

Rep. McGrath

Rep. Porcelli

Rep. Sabourin dit

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Who supports the bill: Dan Richardson, Lisa Rivard

Who opposes the bill: Renee Zobel (NH Fish and Game), Cory Stone

Summary of testimony presented:

Senator Howard Pearl, District 17

- Senator Pearl introduced the bill on behalf of the prime sponsor.

Renee Zobel, Chief of Marine Fisheries (NH fish and Game)

- She spoke in opposition to the bill. She discussed the history and operations of tuna tournaments, which take place in federal waters. Participants win the tournaments by catching the largest fish, but they sell their catch. When the fish enter state waters, the department manages them.
- She noted that the financial situation was important, and while there was excitement about bringing in new revenue, this bill would actually result in a loss of revenue. She estimated that implementation would cost between \$15,000 and \$20,000.

- She explained that the language of the bill was modeled after Maine's regulations and said that the department had issued 12 licenses in the last three years. Implementing this new licensing requirement would impose a significant cost on the department.

Senator Avard asked if he needed a license to catch tune

Ms. Zobel said yes. You would need to obtain a federal permit because they are a highly migratory species and also a state license if you are going to bring it through state waters.

Senator Avard asked how to obtain the license.

Ms. Zobel said the federal permit is online through NOAA and then it depends on if you are fishing recreationally or commercially for a NH license.

Senator McConkey asked if he had heard her correctly and requested clarification on the cost of issuing a new license.

Ms. Zobel said that the most recent license had cost about \$20,000, which was the basis for their estimate.

Senator McConkey asked whether every new license implemented by the department would cost that much.

Ms. Zobel replied that yes, the estimate reflected a system change, as provided by the licensing division.

Senator McConkey said the cost seemed excessive and asked whether that information could be provided to the committee. He also asked for an estimate of what the department anticipated the license fee would be.

Ms. Zobel explained that the current license to fish and transfer costs \$500 for non-residents. She said that if the legislation were to pass, it would give the department and the director authority to set the license fee. She noted that the fee in the State of Maine is \$84. However, Maine receives general funds, whereas their department does not. She added that she anticipated the fee would be higher than that.

Senator Watters asked whether the department would incur a cost of approximately \$23,000 - \$30,00 while generating only about \$120-\$300 in revenue, and if his understanding was correct.

Ms. Zobel responded that this was generally accurate and confirmed that it would result in a significant loss of revenue.

Senator Watters stated that the license fee could not be set higher than \$10 to \$25, which is how he arrived at an estimated maximum revenue of \$120 to \$300.

Ms. Zobel clarified, explaining that the \$10 to \$25 amount referred to the derelict fishing gear fee, which is required in addition to the license. She clarified that this amount is a surcharge and is in addition to the license fee itself.

Senator Watters said he serves on the fisheries commission and is familiar with the condition of fish stocks, and asked her to clarify why federal regulations are in place for the harvesting of tuna.

Ms. Zobel explained that tuna are managed under ICCAT (International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas), an international organization, because bluefin tuna are not limited to New Hampshire waters. She said that ICCAT sets catch limits for regions around the world and that the fishery is heavily monitored. She added that NOAA Fisheries is the agency responsible for establishing limits and seasons under which individuals are allowed to fish.

Senator Watters asked whether it was fair to say that there is considerable pressure on tuna stocks in terms of sustainability.

Ms. Zobel responded that there is significant fishing activity on the stock. She noted that in the previous year, both the southern and northern regions were closed, and that in most years, quotas are met and much of the stock is harvested.

Senator Rosenwald asked whether they were discussing two different fees, including a separate \$10–\$25 add-on for derelict fishing gear.

Ms. Zobel that this was correct and explained that the structure aligns with the language used for their other licenses.

Senator Rosenwald said that the bill was not proposing changes to RSA 211:49-f and clarified that the license under discussion would not be capped at \$25.

Ms. Zobel said no, in fact, they would like to see the fee set much higher than \$25 if the license were implemented.