



SOCIAL LICENSE FOR MAINE SHELLFISH AND SEAWEED FARMING INFOGRAPHIC SERIES:

Social License to Operate 101

Photo provided by
Keith Butterfield

This series is brought to you by the Maine Aquaculture Innovation Center in collaboration with thirty Maine shellfish and seaweed farmers who shared insight into practical ways of earning community support.

WHAT IS SOCIAL LICENSE?

The term social license describes community acceptance of a project. For aquaculture, it is the informal ongoing approval or acceptance of a farm granted by their community [1,2,3,4]. “Community” refers to a farmer’s set of stakeholders, or anyone who could be affected by, or who could affect the farm. There are varying degrees of social license. The highest level of social license is “psychological identification,” or when a community incorporates the activity into its identity (i.e. a fishing community, mill town, etc.) [2]. Tolerance or indifference does not indicate any level of social license—social license describes active support for a farm. Social license is also dynamic and is constantly being re-evaluated by community members. Farmers have to continuously put in social license work to maintain and build support—especially if they anticipate expanding in the future.

WHY IS SOCIAL LICENSE IMPORTANT FOR AQUACULTURE FARMERS?

Maine farmers discussed a variety of real benefits they experienced from doing social license work. One important benefit is that high community approval can reduce the risk of opposition [5,6,7,8,9,10]. Like Bob describes, you can get a license from DMR if you meet all of the conditions outlined by 12 M.R.S.A. §6072, but “if you don’t do the outreach responsibly and correctly, you’re gonna have trouble.”



Social license is “vital” for development of the broader industry.

Photo provided by Krista Rosen and Inga Potter

Beyond this, farmers talked about how earning stakeholder support can be protective in the face of threats. Several farmers brought up examples of supporters going to bat for them when facing regulatory hurdles or pockets of opposition. Riparian supporters would also act as stewards of the farm, letting farmers know if anything was “awry” at the site. Lastly, from a business perspective, though social license work does have costs, there are monetary gains to be made from building relationships. Annie, an oyster farmer from Downeast



Photo provided by
Carrie Byron

Maine, talked about how visiting neighbors and giving away some “doubled up” oysters helped her gain new, consistent customers. In addition to the direct benefits that farmers experience, farmers emphasized that social license work is important for broader industry growth. Increased knowledge and familiarity of aquaculture—often as a result of farmer engagement—has been consistently linked to support for aquaculture development [11,12,13,14,15]. So social license work, or working “the ground game,” as one farmer called it, is “vital” for development of the broader industry.

HOW DO I EARN SOCIAL LICENSE FROM MY COMMUNITY?

Social license is a result of earning your community’s trust. This trust is generated in a variety of ways depending on your farm location and host community. First, you need to do your homework when siting your farm. Learn about your local community, determine who you need to connect with, and find out what is important to them. For aquaculture in Maine, generating trust requires honest and transparent communication with a broad network of stakeholders, listening and responding to public input, being respectful of –and incorporating–local community values into your business, responsible and respectful management of your farm, and providing meaningful community benefits.

REFERENCES

- [1]Joyce, S. and I. Thomson. 2000. “Earning a social licence to operate: Social acceptability and resource development in Latin America”. *CIM Bulletin*. 93(1037):49-53.
- [2]Thomson, I. and R. G. Boutilier. 2011. Social license to operate. In P. Darling (Ed.), *SME Mining Engineering Handbook* (pp. 1779-1796). Littleton, CO: Society for Mining, Metallurgy and Exploration.
- [3]Lacey, J., R. Parsons, and K. Moffat. 2012. “Exploring the concept of a Social Licence to operate in the Australian minerals industry: Results from interviews with industry representatives.” *CSIRO*. 1-26.
- [4]Whitmore, Emily & Cutler, Matthew & Thunberg, Eric. 2022. “Social License to Operate in the Aquaculture Industry: A Community-Focused Framework.” NOAA Technical Memorandum, Report No.
- [5]Gunningham, N., R. A. Kagan, and D. Thornton. 2004. “Social license and environmental protection: Why businesses go beyond compliance.” *Law & Social Inquiry*. 29:307-41.
- [6]Parsons, R. and K. Moffat. 2014. “Constructing the Meaning of Social Licence.” *Social Epistemology*. 28(3-4):340-363.
- [7]Prno, J. 2013. “An analysis of factors leading to the establishment of a social licence to operate in the mining industry.” *Resources Policy*. 38(4):577-590.
- [8]Prno, J., and D. S. Slocombe. 2012. “Exploring the origins of “social license to operate” in the mining sector: Perspectives from governance and sustainability theories.” *Resources Policy*. 345-57.
- [9]Moffat, K. and A. Zhang. 2014. “The paths to social license to operate: An integrative model explaining community acceptance of mining.” *Resources Policy*. 39:61-70.
- [10]Cullen-Knox, C., M. Haward, and J. Jabour. 2017. “The social licence to operate and its role in marine governance: Insights from Australia.” *Marine Policy*. 79:70-77.
- [11]Bouchard, Dylan, Mary Ellen Camire, Christopher Davis, George Shaler, Robyn Dumont, Raymond Bernier and Randy Labbe. 2021. “Attitudes toward aquaculture and seafood purchasing preferences: Evidence from a consumer survey of Atlantic States.” *Aquaculture Economics and Management*. 2021.
- [12]Robertson, R., E. Carlsen, and A. Bright. 2002. “Effect of information on attitudes towards offshore marine finfish aquaculture development in northern New England.” *Aquaculture Economics and Management*. 6(1/2):117-126.
- [13]Thomas, J. B., J. Nordstrom, E. Risen, M. Malmstrom and F. Grondahl. 2018. “The perception of aquaculture on the Swedish West Coast.” *AMBIO*. 47:398-409.
- [14]Sinner, J., M. Newton, J. Barclay, J. Baines, T. Farrelly, P. Edwards and G. Tipa. 2020. “Measuring social licence: What and who determines public acceptability of aquaculture in New Zealand?” *Aquaculture*. 521:1-10.
- [15]Whitmore, Emily & Safford, Thomas & Hamilton, Lawrence. 2022. “What does the public think about farming seafood? Modeling predictors of social support for aquaculture development in the U.S.” *Ocean & Coastal Management*. 226 (4):106279. DOI 10.1016/j.ocecoaman.2022.106279.