

Melissa Cliver / melissacliver@gmail.com / Letter in support of the Blue Economy initiative

Dear Members of the Oregon Legislature,

My name is Melissa Cliver, and I am a product and service designer working at the intersection of economic development, environmental stewardship, and community-led innovation on Oregon's South Coast. I am also an active participant in a local community group, the Empire Coalition, which brings together residents, small business owners, port-adjacent stakeholders, and nonprofit partners focused on the long-term vitality of the Empire neighborhood and surrounding bayfront areas in Coos Bay.

I am writing to advocate for sustained legislative support for Blue Economy–focused projects that are locally grounded, environmentally responsible, and designed to strengthen working coastal communities such as Coos Bay, Empire, Charleston, Bandon, and the broader South Coast region.

Through both my professional work and my involvement with the Empire Coalition, I see firsthand how deeply connected our economy is to the health of our estuaries, ports, and working waterfronts. These are not abstract assets—they are living systems that support jobs, cultural identity, food security, and community resilience. With the right policy frameworks and targeted investment, Blue Economy projects can help stabilize coastal economies while restoring ecosystems that are already under pressure from climate change, aging infrastructure, and market volatility.

Across community conversations and collaborative efforts, consistent opportunities emerge in areas such as:

- Small-scale and regenerative mariculture and aquaculture
- Value-added use of marine and shellfish byproducts
- Workforce development tied to marine trades, food systems, and environmental monitoring
- Pilot and demonstration projects that allow communities to test, learn, and iterate before scaling
- Port- and place-based innovation that supports small, locally owned operators rather than displacing them

Equally important is *how* these projects are designed and supported. Successful Blue Economy efforts on the South Coast require:

- Flexible pilot funding that supports experimentation and learning
- Clear, coordinated permitting pathways that are proportionate to project scale
- Support for local ownership, including tribal, family-run, and small business operators
- Recognition that ports and estuaries can serve as sites of innovation, education, and restoration—not solely extraction or export

As a designer, my role is to translate community needs, environmental constraints, and economic realities into systems that function in practice. As a community member working alongside the Empire Coalition, I see the value of policies that empower local people to steward their own working coastlines. When local knowledge is paired with thoughtful legislation and modest early-stage investment, communities are able to create durable, place-appropriate solutions that deliver measurable economic, social, and environmental returns.

I respectfully urge you to continue advancing legislation, funding mechanisms, and interagency coordination that support Blue Economy projects tailored to the unique context of Oregon's South Coast.

These investments are pragmatic, not speculative—and they represent a pathway toward resilient working waterfronts, diversified rural economies, and long-term stewardship of public trust resources.

Thank you for your leadership and for your attention to the needs and opportunities of coastal communities. I would welcome the opportunity to share additional context or examples from ongoing work in Empire, Coos Bay, and the surrounding region.

Respectfully,

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