

July 25, 2016

Ms. Betsy Nicholson
Federal Co-Lead
Northeast Regional Planning Body
55 Great Republic Drive
Gloucester, MA 01930

RE: Draft Northeast Ocean Plan

Dear Ms. Nicholson:

As the Voice of the Energy Consumer, Consumer Energy Alliance (CEA) is a nationwide association of energy consumers who advocate for balanced policies that support access to affordable, reliable energy. In addition to our nearly 300 company and association members that represent nearly every sector of the U.S. economy, CEA's membership includes more than 400,000 individual citizens across the country, including over 13,000 in the Northeast U.S.

For families and businesses in New England, high energy prices have regrettably become an unwelcome tradition. U.S. Energy Information Administration data shows that consumers in New England on average pay more for electricity than consumers in any other region in the lower 48, with consumers in Massachusetts paying over 50% more for electricity than the national average and Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Vermont paying the highest energy prices in the mainland U.S. In that context, it is all the more critical to avoid new regulatory obstacles or uncertainty that could impede efforts to affordably and reliably meet New Englanders' energy needs.

CEA is concerned that the draft Northeast Ocean Plan (Plan) could, at minimum, introduce significant regulatory uncertainty for activities taking place at all stages of the renewable and conventional energy supply chain, from development and production all the way to transportation and storage.

For example, in addition to the commitment of federal agencies to implement the Plan in their pre-planning, planning, and permitting activities, proposed actions include the application of Plan-identified best practices to implementation of federal laws such as the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act, Natural Gas Act, Deepwater Ports Act, Federal Power Act, and National Environmental Policy Act, and agency use of Plan-related maps that (1) ultimately include offshore "Important Ecological Areas" defined under non-statutory criteria, (2) do not fully account for all marine uses or natural resources in the region such as conventional energy, and (3) are subject to significant limitations as acknowledged in the draft Plan.

Regulatory uncertainty already introduced by this process is underscored by the lack of details on specifically how, when, and which agencies would implement each of the proposed actions discussed in the draft Plan. Finalizing a Plan that leaves such questions unanswered would substantially increase the risk of unforeseen and unintended consequences, including potential adverse impacts for the region's energy consumers.

Therefore, CEA urges the Northeast Regional Planning Body (RPB) to further clarify its proposed actions and their potential implications for existing and future renewable and conventional energy leasing, development, transportation, and storage in the Northeast, and to provide such clarification and information in a revised draft Plan that is subject to additional and adequate time for public review and comment.

In addition, CEA urges the RPB to revise the draft Plan to remove the proposed identification of Important Ecological Areas, reflect existing data related to all offshore natural resources (including conventional energy) in all Plan-related products (including the Northeast Ocean Data Portal), and exclude from the Plan and associated products any data and information that is not compliant with all relevant data integrity laws, regulations, and standards.

On behalf of energy consumers in the Northeast and across the country, thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. Holt", written over a horizontal line.

David Holt
President