



# MAINE

## Lobstermen's Association, Inc.

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Betsy Nicholson, NE RPB Federal Co-lead  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
National Marine Fisheries Service, Northeast Regional Office  
55 Great Republic Drive  
Gloucester, MA 01930-2276

July 25, 2016

Dear Ms. Nicholson,

The Maine Lobstermen's Association (MLA) commends the efforts of the Northeast Regional Planning Body to develop the draft Northeast Regional Ocean Plan. As Maine's oldest and largest fishing industry organization whose mission is to advocate for a sustainable lobster resource and the fishermen and communities that depend on it, the MLA appreciates the opportunity to provide comment on the draft plan.

The MLA supports the overarching goals of the plan and the principles adopted by the RPB for its development. While the task of creating a regional ocean plan is daunting, this draft plan provides a starting point to facilitate improved regional coordination on ocean planning in the northeast region. The MLA strongly supports any efforts to improve coordination amongst federal, state and local governments which also emphasizes the importance of inclusion and input from local stakeholders.

The plan goes a long way in pulling together existing data sets and defining the major categories of use for the region. However, there is still much that defines our maritime region that is difficult to quantify. The lobster fishery has been an important facet of New England's economy for centuries, evolving into a present day multi-billion dollar industry. But lobster and other fisheries also define the social and cultural heritage of much of the New England region and many of our coastal communities. These are attributes that are difficult to define or value – they are priceless – and yet they create the very identity and social fabric of the region. These intrinsic values must be incorporated, prioritized and preserved as part of any ocean planning process.

The MLA appreciates the wealth of data now available through the Northeast Ocean Data Portal. We support the continued development of data on the lobster industry and other fisheries. However, any data collection must serve a specific purpose with clearly defined goals, avoid redundancy with other data collection programs, be user-friendly and cost-effective. This has been difficult to achieve in the lobster fishery due to its size and scale.

The lobster industry, however, is not without data. As reflected in the Data Portal, the fishery has management areas defined through the Lobster FMP, and there are ongoing dealer and harvester reporting programs in place. Not reflected in the data portal are Maine's lobster management zones which are critical to understanding and working with the Maine fishery. Additionally, the MLA worked with Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute and the New England Aquarium in 2012 to map monthly lobster fishing effort along the coast of Maine<sup>1</sup>. The project produced a series of monthly maps of Maine's inshore and offshore lobster fishery. The spatial areas reflect fishing territories as defined by lobstermen which is critical to understand when interacting with the Maine lobster fishery. This work provides a snapshot of lobster fishing effort and a strong grounding in understanding the temporal and spatial patterns of lobster fishing effort in Maine.

In addition to considering this mapping effort, the MLA strongly urges the RPB to incorporate the Lobster and Ocean Planning report produced by the Island Institute into the draft plan. The report provides an excellent context and clear recommendations on how best to work with the lobster industry. This report provides a strong starting point for coordinating with the lobster industry on future ocean planning issues. The RPB should consider producing a similar publication for other New England fisheries.

The MLA will continue to engage in and monitor the evolution of the northeast ocean plan. We encourage you to continue and expand public outreach, especially with the fishing industry.

Thank you for consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Patrice McCarron". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Patrice McCarron  
Executive Director

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Brehme, Patrice McCarron and Heather Tetreault. A Dasymeric Map of Maine Lobster Trap Distribution Using Local Knowledge. The Professional Geographer. March, 2014.