



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

NEWS RELEASE

Vision: Sustainably Managing Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 12, 2016

PRESS CONTACT: Tina Berger
703.842.0740

ASMFC Urges Transparency and Public Input in Proposed New England Offshore Canyons & Seamounts Monument Decision Making Process

Arlington, VA – In a May 9th letter to President Barack Obama, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) urged the President and the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) for transparency and a robust opportunity for public input as the Administration considers designating a National Monument through its authority under the Antiquities Act. While details on the specific location of the monument remain unknown, one potential area discussed centers around the New England offshore canyons and seamounts.

Currently, the New England Fishery Management Council (Council) is drafting an Omnibus Deep-Sea Coral Amendment which considers protection of corals in and around the canyons of the Atlantic Ocean. At the request of the Council, the Commission conducted a survey of active offshore lobstermen to understand the potential impacts to the fishery should lobster traps be limited by the Draft Amendment. Preliminary results indicate a high dependence on the offshore canyons for revenue, with over \$15 million in revenue generated each year by fishermen targeting American lobster and Jonah crab in the canyons. Given that input from concerned stakeholders is a key component of the Council's decision-making process, the Commission strongly supports using the Council process to develop measures to protect the ecosystems within these deep waters.

If the President chooses to use the Antiquities Act to protect deep sea corals, the Commission requested the designated area be limited to the smallest area compatible with the proper care and management of the objects to be protected. Additionally, the Commission requested the area be limited to depths greater than approximately 900 meters and encompass any or all of the region seaward of this line out to the outer limit of the exclusive economic zone. Further, the Commission asked that only bottom tending fishing effort be prohibited in the area and all other mid water/surface fishing methods (recreational and commercial) be allowed to continue in the area.

The May 9th letter to the President follows. For more information, please contact Megan Ware, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at mware@asmfc.org or 703.842.0740.

PR 16-14

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission was formed by the 15 Atlantic coastal states in 1942 for the promotion and protection of coastal fishery resources. The Commission serves as a deliberative body of the Atlantic coastal states, coordinating the conservation and management of nearshore fishery resources, including marine, shell and anadromous species.

1050 N. Highland Street • Suite 200A-N • Arlington, VA 22201
703.842.0740 (phone) 703.842.0741 (fax) www.asmfc.org



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

1050 N. Highland Street • Suite 200A-N • Arlington, VA 22201

703.842.0740 • 703.842.0741 (fax) • www.asmfc.org

Douglas E. Grout (NH), Chair

James J. Gilmore, Jr., (NY), Vice-Chair

Robert E. Beal, Executive Director

Vision: Sustainably Managing Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

May 9, 2016

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

On behalf of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission), I am writing to express the Commission's preference for the continuation of the current New England Fishery Management Council's (NEFMC) regulatory process as the primary approach to protect deep-sea corals in the Atlantic Ocean.

The Commission was formed by the 15 Atlantic coast states in 1942 in recognition that fish do not adhere to political boundaries. The Commission serves as the deliberative body, coordinating the conservation and management of the states shared fishery resources – marine, shell, and anadromous – for sustainable use. The Commission manages several species which are harvested in and around the New England canyons and seamounts area, including American lobster and Jonah crab. These two fisheries have been prosecuted in the offshore canyons for close to five decades and generate over \$15 million per year in direct revenue from the canyons alone.

The NEFMC is currently drafting an Omnibus Deep-Sea Coral Amendment which considers protection of corals in and around the canyons of the Atlantic Ocean. Per the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, the creation of such an Amendment includes multiple stakeholder comment opportunities, public hearings, detailed cost benefit analysis, and NEPA impact analyses. The transparency of the amendment process allows for collaboration between the Commission, NEFMC and stakeholders. In fact, the Commission is currently working with the NEFMC to collect data on the offshore lobster and Jonah crab fishery to fully understand potential impacts to the industry.

The Commission has been informed that you, Mr. President, are considering utilization of the American Antiquities Act of 1906 to protect similar deep-sea coral areas through the designation of a national monument. While the Commission fully supports actions which ensure healthy oceans, there is concern over the lack of public input or impact analysis required in the establishment of a monument through the Antiquities Act. Without specific details on the proposed areas which may be included in a national monument or a potential timeline, it is difficult to characterize the potential impacts to the fishing industry or provide meaningful comments.

President Barack Obama

May 9, 2016

Page 2

At its spring meeting, the Commission unanimously agreed to the following position on this issue. With two separate processes ongoing to protect deep-sea corals in New England waters, the Commission is requesting the NEFMC regulatory process be allowed to continue without the potential for a Presidential proclamation of a national monument. Should you decide to establish a New England waters monument prior to the end of your presidency, the Commission requests any designated areas be limited to the smallest area compatible with the proper care and management of the objects to be protected, as required by the Antiquities Act. Furthermore, the Commission proposes that if you, Mr. President, pursue the designation of a national monument, the area be limited to waters deeper than 900 meters to the outer margin of the exclusive economic zone and only bottom tending fishing gear be prohibited. All other mid water/surface fishing methods, both recreational and commercial, could continue within the designated area with no impact to corals. Finally, the Commission requests the public and affected user groups be allowed to review and comment on any specific proposal prior to its implementation.

Thank you for considering the Commission's comments on this important issue. Please contact me if the Commission can provide any additional information.

Most Respectfully,



Douglas E. Grout
Chairman ASMFC

cc: ASMFC Commissioners

John Bullard, Regional Administrator NOAA Fisheries

Thomas Nies, NEFMC Executive Director