



March 15, 2017

The Honorable Rob Bishop  
Chairman, Committee on Natural Resources  
United States House of Representatives  
1324 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Raul M. Grijalva  
Ranking Member, Committee on Natural Resources  
United States House of Representatives  
1329 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Grijalva:

Thank you for holding today's important hearing on marine protected areas and monuments.

Since 2014, the creation and expansion of marine monuments by executive action has been a primary concern of the commercial fishing industry and the National Coalition for Fishing Communities (NCFC). The NCFC was created by Saving Seafood in 2015 as a partnership among dozens of fishing and seafood industry organizations and businesses to elevate the voices of fishermen across the country in support of their communities. Across the nation, we are represented in Congress by Democrats and Republicans alike.

Our coalition was formed in part because well-funded, well-coordinated non-government organizations claiming to speak for fishermen, have frequently drowned out the actual voices of fishing communities, hurting our ability to effectively communicate to regulators, lawmakers and the public. NCFC members represent key commercial fisheries, across the nation including Atlantic sea scallop, red crab, lobster, tuna, swordfish and squid.

NCFC members from New England and the Mid-Atlantic to Florida, California, the Pacific Northwest and Hawaii have all united in opposition to the unilateral designation of marine monuments through the Antiquities Act. Fishermen have made it clear that the management decisions that affect their livelihoods should be made through democratic, science-driven processes that encourage stakeholder engagement.

The fishing industry cares deeply about protecting the marine ecosystems that provide for and sustain fishing families, but there is a right way and a wrong way to do it. Management decisions through the eight regional fisheries management councils created by the

Magnuson-Stevens Act already require compliance with a wide range of substantive legal requirements, including the Administrative Procedure Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, the Regulatory Flexibility Act, the Marine Mammal Protection Act, the Endangered Species Act, and the Unfunded Mandates Act.

The Council process allows for stakeholders, scientists, and concerned citizens to review and debate policy decisions in a transparent manner. In contrast, the Antiquities Act authorizes the president to take away public areas and public resources with no public input. Using executive authority, the President can close any federal lands and waters in an opaque, top-down process that too often excludes the very people who would be most affected.

Ill-considered monuments have already taken their toll on America's coastal communities. In New England, the recently designated, 5,000 square-mile Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument ejected red crab and trawl fishermen with little notice. Pelagic fisheries, including swordfish and tuna, have been needlessly excluded from the monument area despite the fact that their fishing activities have no impact on the features the monument is meant to protect.

This action was taken with no formal public hearings, cost-benefit analyses, or input from affected constituents, and despite no compelling reason or threat to marine resources. Fish stocks in the monument area were healthy, and the areas were still considered "pristine" after 40 years of fishing activity.

Industry leaders estimate the financial impact on the lobster, crab, squid, mackerel, and butterfish fisheries at approximately \$30 million directly, with \$100 million in indirect impacts. Additionally, the monument closure forces fishing effort into other waters inhabited by endangered right whales, and forces large vessels into competition with inshore small boat fisheries.

Mid-Atlantic fisheries have also been severely impacted by the monument designation. One fishing boat owner in Montauk, New York estimates an annual loss to his business of 15 percent of whiting and squid landings, 25 percent of butterfish landings, and 10 percent of tilefish landings, totaling over \$400,000 a year in value. In any given year, this figure could be significantly higher.

NCFC members continue to fear the expansion of previously created monuments. In Hawaii, the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument was expanded last year into the then-largest marine protected area in the world. Combined with the effects of the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument, the fourth largest marine protected area in the world, Hawaii longline fishermen are now banned from over 60 percent of our Pacific waters.

Reducing access to traditionally important fishing grounds threatens Hawaii's food security, as the fishing industry is the state's largest domestic food producer. It is also damaging to Hawaii's economy, where the 145 boats of the longline fishery support

hundreds of jobs directly and thousands of jobs in related sectors. These fishermen are now being pushed further into international waters, often in competition with foreign fishermen, making it more difficult to support domestic demand for responsibly sourced seafood.

On the West Coast, a proposal last year would have declared virtually all offshore seamounts, ridges and banks off the coast of California as monuments, and would have closed those areas to commercial fishing. These proposals were drafted and advanced behind closed doors with little analysis or public input. The areas marked for closure are critically important for many fisheries, including tuna, swordfish, rockfish, spiny lobster, sea urchins, white seabass, and coastal pelagic species such as mackerels, bonito, and market squid.

While there have not been specific marine monument proposals in the South Atlantic, fishermen and seafood industry groups came together to reject the proposed Eubalaena Oculina National Marine Sanctuary in 2015. These groups pointed out that federal laws already existed to preserve the resources the sanctuary aimed to protect, and expressed their concern that a sanctuary would have adverse effects on Florida's fishing and tourism industries.

Alternatively, the fishing industry has worked with fisheries regulators to achieve remarkable conservation successes. Just last December, the Mid-Atlantic Council and NOAA Fisheries designated the Frank R. Lautenberg Deep-Sea Coral Protection Area, which prohibits most types of bottom-tending fishing gear in a 38,000 square-mile offshore area. Importantly, this action was taken in collaboration with the fishing industry in a process that brought together fishermen, scientists, and regulators.

In light of the economic and cultural harm resulting from ever-expanding marine monuments on America's coastal communities, we hope that Congress will work together, across party lines, to reform the monument and sanctuary designation processes, ensuring they do not continue to harm our nation's hardworking fishermen.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Enclosures