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Massachusetts Fishermen's Partnership Marine Protect Areas (MPAs) Policy

February, 2006

POLICY GOAL:

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) must be designed according to a stakeholder-driven process involving the full participation of fishermen that is based on science developed through collaborative research.

Ongoing monitoring of science-based MPAs must involve the fishing fleet through collaborative research. This position constitutes the foundation for the development of our on-going collaborative research program and for the advocacy of our resulting policy strategy. The MFP is committed to working and collaborating with institutions and agencies dedicated to this approach.

MFP Policy Statement

The Massachusetts Fishermen's Partnership (MFP) represents 18 commercial fishing organizations with a combined membership in all fisheries that has vital long-term economic and social interests in effective resource conservation and ocean management. In order for MPAs to be successful in advancing social and biological benefits, it is essential for fishermen to have a role in defining clearly stated purposes for the MPAs, the MPAs must be sited according to specific scientific criteria that relate to the area being proposed, and the MPAs must be supported across fishing industry sectors.

Background

MPAs are increasingly being considered as a management tool to regulate fisheries. As stated on NOAA's MPA website at www.mpa.gov, the definition of an MPA that is provided in the President's Executive Order 13158 is "any area of the marine environment that has been reserved by federal, state, territorial, tribal, or local laws or regulations to provide lasting protection for part or all of the natural and cultural resources therein."

The MPA Federal Advisory Committee is charged by the Executive Order with providing advice to the Departments of Commerce and the Interior concerning implementation of Section 4 of the Executive Order. This includes development of a national system of MPAs and the provision of

information, tools, science, and strategies to strengthen the stewardship of the nation's marine protected areas. The following expresses MFP recommendations concerning Executive Order 13158:

Policy Position

Regulations impacting fishing in federal waters – inside and outside of MPAs – will continue to be formulated through the Regional Fishery Management Councils established under the Magnuson-Stevens Act. As the national policy on MPAs is being developed, there are key questions and issues that the policy must answer. MPAs must:

- Be crafted through a transparent stakeholder-driven process that is well informed by social science as well as natural science;
- Be delineated according to principles and managed in ways that all sectors of the fishing industry support;
- Have a clearly stated purpose to preserve and protect marine ecosystem function and habitat for vulnerable managed species with clearly defined goals & objectives;
- Be sited according to specific scientific criteria that relate to the area being proposed;
- Have explicit guidelines of allowable and non-allowable uses in a multi-use MPA;
- Be monitored and evaluated with fishermen stakeholder participation according to pre-determined goals and objectives;
- Not be created to protect cultural resources with undetermined value;
- Not be set-aside exclusively for research, particularly in locations and on bottom types for which there already exists sufficient area for control sites;
- Be established in coordination with existing fishery closures and in consideration of existing fishing regulations;
- Be designed in coordination with other maritime endeavors such as mining, dumping, and oil and gas extraction and transport;
- Encompass an area that is the smallest possible to achieve its stated goals;
- Be in effect for the shortest amount of time necessary to achieve its stated goals and no longer; and
- Be managed adaptively as new data becomes available.

Stakeholder-Driven MPA Process

The most important criterion for developing MPAs that provide both social and environmental benefits depends on the quality and depth of stakeholder participation in the process.

The crafting of MPAs must involve fishermen who are most familiar with the areas being considered. It is insufficient to simply call meetings with fishermen to seek their input about local ecosystems and social networks. As such, involving the fishing stakeholders in the process of crafting MPAs must include participation of fishermen through collaborative research not only to gather but also to analyze relevant socio-economic and environmental information. Examples of areas in which fishermen and fishing communities should be involved include charting of fishing activities to map fishing community cultural links with and economic dependence on areas as well as the study of the dynamics of food web biology and other aspects of the environment that both the fishing and scientific communities have identified as important.

A stakeholder-driven MPA process will necessarily begin with discussions about possible sites and reasons for developing an MPA and fishermen will have a voice in designing a locally relevant research plan that will inform the crafting of any MPA proposal. The fishermen will be involved in the research, the analysis of that research, and the integration of the analysis into the proposal before any MPA plan is submitted for public comment. Once an MPA is implemented, fishermen must have a clear and active role in ongoing monitoring and adaptive management of the area.