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## Column: Expanding the fisherman's voice

Rob Moir 15 hrs ago

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Gloucester's fishing industry knows all too well about the complexity of our oceans. Through my years of working with groups like the commercial striped bass fishermen and the Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association, I have seen our fishermen adapt to the highs and lows that come with fishing these seas. That complexity has multiplied as new demands are placed on our ocean and coastal areas. From wind power to aquaculture, there are more and more people making a living off our waters.

And while we all agree that New England should make the most of these opportunities, we can't do it at the expense of our fishermen's livelihood, the health of our ocean wildlife or the places where our families go to play. It is now more critical than ever for us to effectively protect our oceans.

That is why I'm proud to see the years of compromise come to fruition with the release of our nation's first draft regional ocean plan. Following the establishment of the National Ocean Policy in 2010, a planning body made up of New England states, local tribes and federal agencies came together to coordinate the efforts of all agencies that work on ocean-related issues. The result: a draft plan that streamlines ocean management at all levels of government.

I applaud the Northeast Regional Planning Body for a great first draft. I'm happy to see that the first goal focuses on maintaining healthy ocean ecosystems. This connects so well to my many years of working with fishermen and other ocean users to adopt a more ecosystem-based approach to ocean management.

For those in the fishing industry, this plan provides many benefits. But what tops the list in my mind is the ability to have all of this robust data and information in one place. With 150 species of marine life, the data portal is full of science and research that has been thoroughly validated. Anyone reading the

plan can add comments or observations, and make note of any perceived gaps in the information. It allows us, for the first time ever, to break down siloes of information that have existed across the numerous state and federal agencies that manage our oceans.

This plan will also allow for a more transparent decision-making process. We will be able to hold the various agencies accountable and ensure they update the data as new, more accurate information is available. And, we will start to gather information on certain fish species that we didn't have access to in the past, such as sea herring and squid.

Last but not least, this plan will provide opportunities for those who manage our fisheries to be at the table with other agencies on a regular basis, resulting in more cross-agency collaboration and coordination. This added knowledge and shared understanding of our region's opportunities and challenges will provide for better decision making.

We know that the ocean is complex, but with the Northeast Regional Ocean Plan, we can balance our existing uses with the many new and increasing demands. Rather than creating a new set of laws, the ocean plan will provide scientific data and other information that will help decision makers and regulators to do their jobs even better. The plan will identify areas of ecological, recreational and commercial importance and ways to protect these priorities, including those identified by the New England Fishery Management Council.

Planners are asking everyone -- from fishermen, boaters and beachgoers, to lawmakers and government regulators -- to come together and review the draft plan so we end up with a final version that is well-informed, comprehensive and makes sense.

Your voice has to be a part of this plan if we're going to make sure that it's balanced and actionable -- and that it considers the needs of our fishing industry. If you weren't able to join Monday's public comment meeting here in Gloucester, I encourage you to share your comments on the plan directly with the Northeast Regional Planning Body before the July 25 deadline. You can submit your thoughts online at [neooceanplanning.org/plan](http://neooceanplanning.org/plan).

Bringing together many people's voices will ensure the plan best speaks for all of New England and everything the ocean means to us. Now is the time to make your voice heard so we can better manage and protect the ocean we all depend on.

Rob Moir, Ph.D., is president and executive director of the Ocean River Institute in Cambridge.

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william skrobacz

1 hour ago

the sea belongs to it's people ,not the government seems nobody is listening at all! the oil companies will own it all

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