

September 26, 2023

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Honorable Chairman Bruce Westerman
House Committee on Natural Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Westerman,

I am submitting this testimony as regards the Northeast Canyons Marine Monument to the Committee along with a series of comment submissions. Seafreeze vessels have sustainably fished in the Monument area for decades, pursuant to the high federal standards of the Magnuson Stevens Act, under which US fisheries are the 7th most regulated industry in the United States.¹ In fact, when the Monument was initially designated, our vessels fished in the area right up until the day they were evicted. I even received a phone call from our vessel's satellite phone offshore, with the captain asking me how much longer they had until they were required to leave.

Since 2015, we have submitted comment after comment to the federal government detailing the serious impacts that the Monument would have, and has had, on our commercial fishing vessels. Included in this comment are:

1. Two emails submitted to NOAA's Monument "comment portal" in 2015, which was an unofficial process with changing goalposts for comment submission deadlines, and the details of which nobody at NOAA could explain. The confidential vessel data, provided to NOAA in the comment portal, have been removed.
2. Testimony provided to this Committee's Subcommittee on Water, Power and Oceans on May 17, 2016 on this issue, along with the official Committee invitation notice to testify.
3. A 2016 joint letter from the Rhode Island Congressional delegation to CEQ raising the very real fisheries issues for RI vessels that would arise from Monument designation.
4. Two letters to the Secretary of the Interior and Secretary of Commerce in 2017 on the topic of this Monument.

¹ See <https://www.mercatus.org/research/data-visualizations/mclaughlin-sherouse-list-10-most-regulated-industries-2014>.

5. Testimony provided to the Biden Administration in 2021 on the impacts of the Monument to Seafreeze vessels and our fisheries.

I personally have fished in the monument on board one of our fishing vessels and witnessed the impacts. During that trip, we steamed for hours across the Monument to look for fish on the other side. After not finding the species we were targeting, we were then forced to steam for hours back across the Monument. It didn't matter even if the captain could see fish inside the Monument itself; we were forced to waste time, fuel, expense, and effort rather than be allowed to sustainably harvest our target species in the area that our vessels have worked since they were built. Removing historic fishing grounds, opportunity and income through an Executive Order is punitive to hard-working U.S. commercial fishermen, who are held to the highest fisheries standards in the world.

Thank you for your attention to this very important matter.

Sincerely,
Meghan Lapp
Fisheries Liaison
Seafreeze Shoreside, Seafreeze Ltd.