

October 2, 2023

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

Chairman Paul Gosar
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
House Committee on Natural Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Westerman and Subcommittee Chairman Gosar:

Thank you for convening the September 19, 2023, hearing on Examining Barriers to Access in Federal Waters: A Closer Look at the Marine Sanctuary and Monument System in the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations.

My colleagues and I at Saving Seafood have worked with the domestic seafood industry for years to urge the use of the provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Act to manage fisheries in all Federal waters, including in marine monuments. When the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument was first proposed in 2016, we worked with numerous elected and appointed officials toward this goal, but ultimately, President Obama included a ban on commercial fishing in the monument designation.

The difference between how members of the Trump Administration, and members of the Biden-Harris Administration handled examining the effects of the commercial fishing ban could not be more different.

We began working with members of the Trump Administration to request a reversal of the commercial fishing ban in the Spring of 2017. This led to a June 16, 2017, meeting in Boston for affected fishing interests with Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke, and subsequent meetings in Washington, DC. Secretary Zinke recommended that the President remove the commercial fishing ban later that year. A series of White House meetings began in March 2019 and continued for over a year, in which Administration staff requested a great deal of information regarding the effect of the commercial fishing ban, and additional data and analysis from independent respected fishery scientists.

In June 2020, President Trump removed the ban on commercial fishing, creating fairness and parity between commercial and recreational fishing interests.

In March 2021, before the Biden-Harris Administration had a confirmed Interior Secretary in place, two conference calls were held in which members of the nation's fishery management councils, and members of the fishing industry were given just one hour to explain their reasons for opposing a reimposition of the commercial fishing ban.

In June 2021, after Secretary Deb Haaland was confirmed by the Senate, we requested a meeting with the Secretary so that members of the swordfish and tuna longline industry could explain why analyses funded by environmental interests claiming that the commercial fishing ban had no negative effect on their fisheries were inaccurate. Our letter was acknowledged via email by Shantha Ready Alonso, Director of the Office of Intergovernmental and External Affairs (OIEA) at the Office of the Secretary, U.S. Department of the Interior. Despite numerous follow up calls and emails, there was no response to the letter. On Columbus Day, 2021 the commercial fishing ban was reimposed. We received a response in December 2021. It was a form letter merely describing that the ban had been reimposed.

Our nation's commercial fishing industry deserved to be heard.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Robert Vanasse", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Robert B. Vanasse
Executive Director