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Testimony Of The MASSACHUSETTS FISHERMEN'S PARTNERSHIP On An Act Relative to Oceans (S529) Before The Joint Committee On Environment, Natural Resources, And Agriculture

June 13, 2007

My name is David Bergeron. I am Executive Director of the Massachusetts Fishermen's Partnership (MFP). The Massachusetts Fishermen's Partnership (MFP) is an umbrella organization of 18 commercial fishing associations representing all gear and geographic sectors of the Massachusetts fishing industry. The organization was created to promote the common interests and economic viability of commercial fishermen and fishing families. The MFP conducts collaborative research and is sponsor of the Fishing Partnership Health Plan, which provides comprehensive healthcare coverage for more than 2000 members in the fishing community. I am also a member of the board and Treasurer of Commercial Fishermen of America, an organization founded to promote the common interests of commercial fishermen across the nation.

I would like to thank legislators and Senator Robert O'Leary in particular for working with us on this legislation. Ocean management pertaining to new and emerging uses of the marine environment is very much needed and legislation to do it wisely is not coming too soon.

The threatening clouds of unbridled ocean development are gathering on the horizon. Unwise ocean development projects will have profound impacts on the biodiversity and productivity of species critical to sustainable fisheries and sustainable fishing activities that yield enormous social and economic benefits to all our citizens. The need for a rational approach to assess and manage such developments could not be clearer. Fishermen everywhere are very concerned.

As such the Massachusetts Fishermen's Partnership (MFP) Board of Directors expressed strong support last year for legislation to regulate ocean development projects, to protect fisheries, fishing activities, and productive fishing grounds from harmful impacts of pollution and other threats posed by unwise projects in the marine environment.

I applaud provisions of S529 that provide for the exclusive rulemaking authority of the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) with regards to fisheries and fishing activities in an ocean plan. I endorse keeping all language in the legislation that reinforces this exclusive DMF role in fisheries management. If any conflict ever occurred between DMF fisheries rules and an ocean plan, the DMF rules would govern.

In addition, a very important aspect of this bill is that it incorporates a mechanism for fishing industry representation on an ocean science advisory council. This council will provide advice to the Secretary of Environmental Affairs pertaining to matters of ocean and marine research. One scientist of this panel of 9 scientists will be designated by the MFP to provide information pertaining to the empirical knowledge of fishermen as the council accumulates data and provides advice to the secretary with respect to research concerns and priorities. This important provision addresses a crucial missing link to better integrate fishermen's observations into the scientific process and improve scientific understanding. The legislation could take this innovation another step forward by explicitly naming collaborative research with fishermen as a priority use of funds deposited in the Ocean Resources and Waterways Trust Fund and the Marine Fisheries Trust Fund. There is growing recognition among scientists, managers, and fishermen that collaborative research is a very important way to increase scientific knowledge and understanding. Collaborative research promotes consensus and reduces management costs. As such collaborative research warrants citation as a priority use of resources available in the trust funds.

Ocean management legislation is important to oceans and fisheries in Massachusetts and other coastal states as a first-in-the-nation model for the protection of fisheries and fishing activities from the "wild west" of ocean development projects being proposed or contemplated in ocean waters here in Massachusetts and across the nation.

I have met with and spoken with commercial fishermen on all three coasts. I recently spent a week in California where I spoke first hand with commercial fishermen involved in the implementation of that state's Marine Life Protection Act. The policy and governance framework that is presented in our Massachusetts ocean management legislation bears no resemblance to approaches taken in California. Most importantly, this legislation will not create a new agency with authority to manage fisheries. The legislation before us in Massachusetts also provides greater opportunity for the integration of fishermen's observations into the research and management process.

I am pleased to note that the bill's findings declare the social and economic value of fishing to the Commonwealth. Fishing was *the* founding industry of the Massachusetts Bay Colony almost 400 years ago, and fishing has been an integral part of the identity of Massachusetts from then until the present time. In addition to providing locally caught healthy seafood for all to enjoy, fishermen bring their knowledge and experience of fishing in the marine environment back to shore to enrich our communities, schools and research institutions. It is vitally important to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts -- economically, socially and culturally -- that this identity be preserved and enhanced.

We all understand that S529 still has a way to go before becoming law. The MFP is committed to working with legislators throughout the process to ensure that the final bill enacted will be a good law. We are committed to passage of a bill in which all Massachusetts citizens can take pride and which will set the stage for the development of ocean management policies that will promote the contributions of our fishing heritage and protect the environment for generations to come.

Thank you for the opportunity of providing this testimony today.
Respectfully,
David Bergeron, Executive Director