



Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association

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July 13, 2026

Via email: will.gardner@mail.house.gov

The Honorable Bruce Westerman, Chairman
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jared Huffman, Ranking Member
Committee on Natural Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Support for H.R. 9436 – North Atlantic Right Whale Regulatory Extension Act

Chairman Westerman, Ranking Member Huffman, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of its 1,800 members, the Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association (MLA) respectfully submits this letter in support of H.R. 9436, introduced by Representative Michael Lawler and cosponsored by Representative Jared Golden, which would extend the existing regulatory framework established under the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 concerning the North Atlantic right whale through 2035.

Established in 1963, the MLA is a member-driven organization that recognizes and supports the interdependence of marine resource conservation and the economic sustainability of Massachusetts' commercial fishing industry. For more than six decades, the MLA has worked collaboratively with the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, and the National Marine Fisheries Service to ensure that lobster management remains both environmentally responsible and economically viable.

Commercial lobstering is a historic part of what helped build this great country, and Massachusetts lobstermen have long served as stewards of the marine environment. Today, they continue to fish under some of the most comprehensive and restrictive conservation measures imposed on any fixed-gear fishery in the world. These measures—including extensive seasonal closures, weak rope and diameter requirements, additional gear marking, and other risk-reduction initiatives—have required significant financial investment and operational changes by fishermen. Our members have consistently demonstrated their willingness to adapt, innovate, and work alongside scientists and regulators to reduce potential risks to protected species while maintaining sustainable fishing operations.

The temporary pause enacted by Congress in 2022 provided an important opportunity to improve the scientific foundation upon which future management decisions will be based. Since then, meaningful progress has been made through expanded whale monitoring programs, improved understanding of

seasonal whale distribution, enhanced acoustic detection technologies, updated population assessments, and more refined analyses of entanglement risk. At the same time, Massachusetts has continued implementing and enforcing some of the most stringent right whale protection measures anywhere along the Atlantic coast.

Perhaps most importantly, the conservation measures currently in Massachusetts have not yet had sufficient time to fully demonstrate their effectiveness. Many of these management actions were only recently implemented or significantly expanded, and conservation outcomes involving long-lived species such as the North Atlantic right whale cannot be accurately evaluated over such a short timeframe. Biological responses, changes in whale distribution, compliance monitoring, and risk reduction all require multiple years of data collection and analysis before meaningful conclusions can be drawn. Prematurely imposing an entirely new suite of regulations before existing measures have been properly evaluated risks undermining both sound science and effective resource management.

Allowing the current regulatory framework to remain in place through 2035 would provide scientists and managers the opportunity to evaluate whether the substantial conservation investments already made by Massachusetts fishermen are producing the intended results. It would also allow regulators to incorporate additional years of monitoring data, improved modeling techniques, and a more complete understanding of changing ocean conditions and whale behavior into future management decisions. This measured approach reflects the principles of adaptive management—making decisions based on observed outcomes rather than assumptions or incomplete information.

Importantly, extending the existing framework does not eliminate or weaken protections for the North Atlantic right whale. The robust conservation measures currently in place would remain fully enforceable, and agencies would continue investing in research, monitoring, and collaborative efforts to further reduce entanglement risk. Rather than creating regulatory uncertainty through repeated deadlines that outpace the available science, H.R. 9436 would provide the stability necessary for agencies, researchers, and the fishing industry to complete this work responsibly.

America's commercial fishermen have consistently demonstrated their commitment to protecting marine resources while sustaining coastal economies. Massachusetts lobstermen have embraced new technologies, participated in cooperative research, complied with increasingly restrictive regulations, and partnered with management agencies to develop practical conservation solutions. They deserve a regulatory process that allows enough time to determine whether these significant conservation efforts are achieving their intended objectives before additional burdens are imposed.

H.R. 9436 strikes an appropriate and responsible balance between protecting one of the world's most endangered whale species and preserving the economic viability of historic fishing communities throughout the Northeast. By extending the current framework through 2035, Congress would ensure that future management decisions are based on a more complete scientific record, provide regulators the time necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of existing conservation measures in Massachusetts and throughout the region, and maintain protections for the North Atlantic right whale while avoiding unnecessary economic disruption to thousands of fishing families and coastal businesses.

In closing, the members of the Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments and respectfully urge your support for H.R. 9436.

Sincerely,
Beth Casoni
Executive Director