

## Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument

### Public Comments Transcript

Friday, October 13, 2023

Attendees: 20

**Jessica Miller** 00:01

We're happy to answer other questions before heading into the public comment period. Not seeing any hands, you're welcome to, of course, put up your hand and come off mute and ask questions. And I think we'll be kind of transitioning into the public comment period. So this is a forum to provide feedback and input on the monument management plan, draft. And, you know, please do raise your hand by using the raise hand function, Zoom. Or if you're coming from from a phone and you're reaching us via phone, you can hit star nine. And that will indicate that you would like to make a comment to us so that we can see your hand being raised and we can call on you. We'll be taking these as they come, so do just put up your hand and if we don't immediately get to you, it's because there are a couple of other folks in line. So we'll be taking them as, as they come. Again, this is an opportunity to submit a formal comment and this will be recorded and transcribed and, and is in addition to the opportunities to provide written comment on the website. So these are the two kind of big avenues that we're providing in order to create space for comments to come in. So please do raise your hand if you have any comments you'd like to submit for the record about the management plan. And we're happy to take them at this time. So I don't see any hands yet. But anyone is, oh, Megan sure, Go ahead.

**Meghan Lapp** 01:39

Thank you, Meghan Lapp, Seafreeze. To follow up on some of the questions that had been asked before. You know, we have opposed this monument since, you know, its inception really way back in 2016. And the idea, you know, put forth in the draft monument plan that somehow this area is going to be publicly accessible to, you know, the general population as well as environmental justice communities is complete nonsense. It is on the edge of the Outer Continental Shelf and also off of the continental shelf, no one is going to see these canyons, they're a mile down. You can't go down there, you can't scuba dive down there, you will be crushed by the weight of the water. The idea that this is being put out there as a monument for the American public to enjoy is a complete farce. No one will be out there. The only people that are out there now are commercial fishermen, and potentially some recreational fishermen. So the only, the only impact to the United States of America will be the disruption and prohibition of a domestic food source to the American people. No one in the general public will be out there. To the HMS issues that were raised previously, NOAA does not have any way to ensure that an individual who is fishing in the monument is fishing recreationally or commercially on board and HMS permitted vessel. The general category HMS permit vessels do not have to declare into

recreational or commercial fishing prior to leaving the dock. There is no way to enforce that. And that it is very interesting to me that recreational fishing will be allowed in the monument, while commercial fishing is not. I don't see the difference, quite frankly. So that's my comment. Thank you.

**Jessica Miller** 03:49

Thanks for your comment. Meghan. Katie, go ahead.

**Katie Cubina** 03:57

Hi, there. Thank you for the opportunity to comment today. My name is Katie Cubina and I'm the Senior Vice President for mission programs at Mystic Aquarium. Just going to pause for one second and make sure that I'm being heard okay.

**Jessica Miller** 04:09

Yes, the audio is fine. Initially it was a little bit low.

**Katie Cubina** 04:14

Okay. Well, first of all, I really want to applaud the agencies for putting together such a comprehensive and robust plan, a management draft management plan for the Northeast monument and to emphasize that this is the only marine monument in federal waters of the Atlantic Ocean. I appreciate and agree with the set of goals that were set forward. From my perspective as it relates to my personal and professional position at Mystic Aquarium. I specifically am going to be focusing on the research and exploration goal and the engagement and education goal. I will leave the research and exploration goal comments to my colleague, Dr. Peter Auster, who has submitted written testimony already and use my time to focus on the engagement and education goal. First of all, I, I applaud the agency's inclusion of underserved audiences and underrepresented groups in the management plan. It is often a challenge to engage those audiences and I think partnering and extensive attention around equity is going to be essential in order to make those goals a reality. And I just want to point out that, certainly aquariums across the country are committed to working with you to do that. As it relates to education and outreach, I think that while there is a limited number of people who will ever physically experience the Monument in real time, in in place, we have a tremendous opportunity now with technology, and institutions like Mystic Aquarium that have an exhibit on the Marine National Monument that heavily utilizes multimedia resources, including whale sounds, ambient light, incredible video. And these are the opportunities to bring this very special place in the ocean to the public, to students, educators in the general public. So, you know, in fact, we have upwards of 750,000 people a year who are experiencing this, this very unique place. Unique in that it is the only place in the Atlantic that is protected from commercially extracted activities. And a place where scientists can really begin to study nature undisturbed, which is so essential in the face of climate change. A few recommendations I would just make or suggestions, In that in some of the descriptions of the educational activities there are really good opportunities to partner with NOAA ocean exploration. They have done a tremendous job of creating educational materials that align to the ocean literacy principles and the Next Generation Science Standards. Only through those alignments will curriculum and content created around the Northeast Monument be easily utilized and adapted by formal educators. I strongly recommend partnership with the National Marine Educator Association, and the regional chapters that are adjacent to the monument region. Also important but I think is might be currently missing, although I'm sure the

intent is there is to partner with informal science education institutions and informal community based organizations that work with youth and oftentimes underserved youth and BIPOC youth in out of school time, meaning after school and summer camps. Prime examples are Boys and Girls Clubs and YMCA as is 21st century learning centers. And these are places where young people find a second home and are able to engage in academic enrichment programming that is not tied to the rigors of the curricular framework that is that is mandated through the public school system. So that that's all I would like to share. And again, thank you for putting together such a comprehensive and robust draft management plan. I urge expediency in finalizing this plan, hopefully in the first part of 2024, if possible, and I look forward to working with you along with my colleagues in the zoo and aquarium industry to help bring this very special place to the public because conserving special areas of the ocean, it can only be accomplished if people really have an opportunity to experience them. Thank you very much.

**Jessica Miller** 09:38

Thank you for your comments. Katie. Gordon, you can come off mute and provide your comment.

**Gordon Carr** 09:44

Thank you. Gordon Carr, port director at the Port of New Bedford. I would like to just echo Meghan's typically pressing and succinct remarks. There are, there are so many questions about some of the commercial fishing prohibition. And I would just ask, I think maybe this goes to Marianne and we mentioned this in writing as well, when NOAA does do their public comment process, I would, I would urge you to hold a public session, an in-person session in the Port of New Bedford, and in other ports. Don't, please don't just follow the Plymouth, Providence and Portsmouth locations. Our port's the number one fishing port in the United States. I think if you're going to be talking about the impacts on commercial fishing, those conversations ought to be had where the commercial fishermen and the fishing interests are. We at the port will assist in any way logistically in helping to set that up. But I just wanted to make that formal request here as well. Thank you.

**Jessica Miller** 10:57

Thanks for your comments, Gordon. Does anyone else have comments at this time to submit for the record? Happy to take additional comments. Isabella, go ahead.

**Isabella DeFrancesco** 11:13

Hi, everyone. Thank you so much for putting together this plan. I am from the Surfrider Foundation, so we've been following this for, closely for the past five, six plus years and I just wanted to add that with the development of the draft management plan as required by the Presidential proclamations, we at Surfrider commend the Biden Harris administration's continued demonstrated commitment to secure the monument's extraordinary biodiversity, and cultural resources and to advance the goal to conserve and restore at least 30% of the US lands and waters by 2030. And I also want to say that I commend the draft plan's inclusion of an exploration and research plan aimed at improving understanding of biological, physical, cultural, and historical resources in the monument. The monument serves as a living laboratory and future research should effectively inform management to advance conservation outcomes that sustain its biodiversity through climate change impacts. And my last point that I'd like to make is that we at Surfrider urge the final management plan to include an effective monitoring and enforcement program to ensure compliance consistent with the Proclamations. The final management

plan must require all vessels transiting through or operating in the monument to have an automated identification system and vessel monitoring systems turned on at all times to ensure the effective enforcement and compliance with the monument rules and regulations. In addition, we acknowledged the draft plan's permitting goals and urged their improvement through the implementation of a joint agency access permit, similar to permits use in other monuments to better track and understand the uses of the monument.

**Jessica Miller** 13:09

Thank you so much for your comments, Isabella. Laura, looks like you are up next. Go ahead.

**Laura Busch** 13:17

Hello, can you hear me okay?

**Jessica Miller** 13:18

Yeah, we can hear you.

**Laura Busch** 13:20

Wonderful. Thank you. This is Laura Busch, I'm with the US Navy and I know we provided some comments on the draft management plan, and I appreciate the opportunity to do that. I also just wanted to point out that the Navy also does conduct research mostly through the Office of Naval Research or O&R. And so I do need to take another look at the management plan and refresh my memory of it but I just want to make sure that we're able to handle the research activities and navy military readiness activities appropriately and properly in the management plan. It's potential we need to add more information or just figure out where that research will fall into within the plan.

**Jessica Miller** 14:06

Thanks so much, Laura for your comments. Anything else? No. Okay. You took your hand down. Thank you very much. Anyone else have comments for the team? We're happy to to have any any additional comments. We haven't heard from several folks so feel free to come off mute. Again, any additional comments that anyone has, feel free to raise your hand come off mute. Any other comments or questions that you'd like to submit for the record? Sure, I see RBV. Can you say your name please? You can come off mute.

**Robert Vanasse** 15:36

Sorry about that. And this is Bob Vanasse at Saving Seafood. You know, along with Gordon and Meghan and Greg, we have consistently urged, as Senator Warren said in writing at one point, that commercial fishing everywhere, including in the monuments, should be managed under the framework of the Magnuson-Stevens act, and not by presidential fiat. Obviously, we're opposed to the way this was done. Many of us hope that at some point, Justice, Chief Justice Roberts will have the opportunity to point out the absurdity of the use of the of the Antiquities Act, which was created for the preservation of Indigenous pottery, as he pointed out, to create areas the size of Connecticut. I appreciate what the folks from the foundation and the aquarium said. However, I don't understand how proper management under the Magnuson-Stevens Act would negatively affect anything that they said they'd like to do. And in fact, it just seems ridiculous considering that the New York Aquarium gave awards to members of the

New England and mid Atlantic Council when the deep sea coral amendments were put in place that provided protection for these areas, without the need for the monument. I feel very badly for you, doing this work having to create a commercial management plan when there already was a good commercial fishery management plan in place. And obviously, you're in a difficult position because the Presidential Proclamation, which was put through with absolutely, with, with two hours of input from the eight fishery management councils and the entire commercial fishing industry before there was even a Secretary of Interior in place. It's just not the way a government in a democracy is supposed to work. I wish rather than doing this, there were an opportunity to be working with the aquariums and the foundations to do this properly and to do it with proper management. We will continue, whether it's in the courts or through the administration to try to restore proper management of commercial fishing. I wish you all the best, despite thinking that this is a true travesty and an inappropriate way for government to operate. I wish you the best.

**Jessica Miller** 17:50

Thanks so much for your comments. We appreciate it. Any other comments from anyone else? Feel free, feel free to raise your hand or come off mute. And just confirming, Robert, that you didn't have an additional comment, your hand is still raised? If so please come off mute.

**Robert Vanasse** 18:27

No, I apologize. I'm just on my phone in the car. So I apologize for not handling it properly.

**Jessica Miller** 18:33

Oh no, no problem at all. Just wanted to confirm. Any other comments?

**Robert Vanasse** 18:39

Well, I guess one thing I will add, I will add something. It was it was entertaining to hear the representative of the Mystic Aquarium use the phrase "the only monument in the Atlantic" because when we were working on this, a number of senior Democratic members of House and Senate staff told us that basically, this was effectively a gift to the environmental community that wanted at least one monument in the Atlantic. And again, that's just not the way for things to be done. So hopefully we can move forward. But I I wish the representative of the aquarium and other environmental NGOs the best because they did succeed in getting this through inappropriately, as I've said, but hopefully we can do something to restore the ability for highly migratory fisheries to work there. We've raised the issue of environmental justice and underserved communities. I mean, these fishermen should have the opportunity to fish in, to fish for pelagic species in the water column over the monument without harming the seamounts and canyons. Again, I feel badly that you're in this position because there, there is and was a proper regime for managing highly migratory species, for managing red crab, for managing offshore lobster, for managing butterflyfish and other species that Meghan has spoken about. And this is just a travesty. And again, I wish you the best and I'm hoping that we can, a way to restore proper management under Magnuson-Stevens and not a ban by presidential fiat. And I wish that actually, the representative of the aquarium might respond to why proper management under the Magnuson-Stevens Act, as we had before, would prevent them from doing any of the things that she described. I realize we're not questioning each other. But that's a friendly request.

**Jessica Miller** 20:38

Okay, thanks.

**Katie Cubina** 20:40

I'm happy to respond to that. And, you know, understanding that I am not a scientist by training. However, I have worked closely with scientists and I represent our institution. What I will say is that the monument is being tasked with managing for biodiversity. And biodiversity extends way beyond commercial fishing species. So when you're removing commercially fished species from an ecosystem, it does change the ecosystem, it changes the predator prey dynamics, etc. And fishing here does unfortunately, damage fragile, long lived deep sea coral communities. That's a fact. That's not conjecture. Now, when you speak about removing apex predators and migratory species from the surface, the surface waters, then what you're doing is you're selectively removing certain species that can have cascading effects on the ecological food webs of these areas. I certainly see relevancy in the fisheries management councils, managing fisheries in the vast, the very, very vast majority of the exclusive economic zone. But my understanding, and again, I'm not an expert, but I believe it's about 1.5%, that is being effectively closed off to commercial fishing. And from the reports that I have seen, what we've seen, the commercial fishers do is ship their effort to other areas, they don't see that, I haven't seen any evidence that any catch has actually gone down, or that there's been any significant economic impact. Now perhaps I've raised enough issues that this is something you might choose to debate offline as I don't want to hold up people's time. But I think the very important difference that I see, and I was actually involved in the stakeholder process of the designation of this monument, and I was well aware of many conversations that took place from the Council of Environmental Quality, and a variety of stakeholders that included commercial fishers. So I, I do disagree with the comment that the process eliminated that voice or did not consider that voice. However, I think that's a moot point at this point, as you pointed on, but I stand strong in that there ought to be pockets of of the ocean, just like there are pockets on land that remain undisturbed, so that we can really study how nature works, without human intervention. I think as we look at the impacts of climate change that we've seen, particularly this past summer, if we don't have those locations, we're going to be in pretty, pretty dark trouble from this point on. And I say this, with the fact that I am also married to a commercial payment. So I understand the side of commercial fishing interests, and I understand how challenging it can be to be a commercial fisherman and I understand how it's how, when the resource declines, it is, it makes things all the more challenging. But I go back to, I go back to the statement about the ocean being the public commons. It doesn't belong to commercial fishermen, it doesn't belong to scientists. It's a public resource that needs to be managed. And if you don't have certain areas, where you can study them undisturbed, then we don't we'll never have the full picture and we will not be able to make informed decisions as the oceans change which as we know, they're doing it. I think the biggest enemy to marine ecosystems and wildlife and probably commercial fishers is climate change. So we've got to understand that system better and how it's impacting marine life.

**Jessica Miller** 24:55

Thanks for your comments, Katie.

**Robert Vanasse** 24:58



So would you support, So would you support banning recreational fishing since you're opposed to human interaction and human extraction?

**Katie Cubina** 25:06

I didn't say sorry, an interaction and human extraction, I said commercially extracted activities. So please don't put words in my mouth. And I don't fish.

**Robert Vanasse** 25:20

Do fish care whether they're extracted,

**Jessica Miller** 25:22

Sorry, I think I'm going to have to ask you all to take this offline because this is a public comment period for the management plan. And if you have something to say about the management plan, please do share it now. But I can't, I can't control both of you, muting and unmuting all the time. So I'm asking you to please if you have a conversation that you need to have offline, please do so. But if you have a comment, that's about the management plan directly, we're happy to take it but please do wait your turn, and then I'll call on you. So it sounds like there's, it looks like there's one comment here. But again, just encouraging you to take it offline if you need to have a conversation separately. Much appreciated. But if there is a comment on the management plan, please do, you can come off mute now.

**Robert Vanasse** 26:20

Are you calling on me?

**Jessica Miller** 26:22

Yes. Yes, go ahead.

**Robert Vanasse** 26:27

Then my, my comment would be if members of the environmental community feel that human interaction, human extraction is inappropriate, then all human extraction should be, should be stopped. I believe it's hypocritical, to allow people, if they want to go there with cameras show people what this area is. That's great. I applaud everything that the aquarium director suggested. But if the position is that human extraction, whether this is the White House,

**Jessica Miller** 27:02

It seems like we lost him. I think he was on the phone. Okay, well, he might rejoin. Hopefully we can get a summary of his comment if he rejoins. Yeah, apologies for having to intervene there, I just, we need to, we need to keep things somewhat, you know. Just make sure everybody has an opportunity to say what they want to say. So if there are other comments, I'm happy to take them at this time, and we do appreciate. Any additional comments or questions you'd like to submit for the record? Please do raise your hand. Any other comments or questions you'd like to submit about the management plan? We really appreciate all the comments we received today and we hope that you'll consider written comment as well. So, I want to make sure that we have this up on the screen, that we have additional meetings outside of this. And in the meantime, if you do have a comment you think of please do put your hand up

or come off mute. But, I want to go over this information, which is important to keep in mind. So we have a couple of meetings coming up, in addition to the ones that we've already had. So we have one next week in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, at a public library on the 18th from 5:30 to 7:30. We also have a final virtual meeting next week, or sorry, a week and a half from now on the 23rd of October on Monday in the evening from 5:30 to 7:30pm. And then in the meantime, you're welcome to submit a written comment also reviewing the monument plan on the website and also submitting comments electronically through regulations.gov. And the link is up here, as well as a QR code to access that. You can also submit a written comment by using the snail mail address here for the superintendent which is Brittany Peterson at the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts National or Marine National Monument and otherwise yeah, we hope to see you in another meeting and one last call to also ask if there are any additional comments or questions that anyone has at this time. Again, we appreciate all your comments and questions and thank you very much for submitting them. We do take these into account and all of them have been recorded and will be turned into a transcript and that transcript will be available up on the website within a couple of weeks. We try to get them up within 10 days but it does sometimes take a little bit longer than that. So please do look up, look out for those transcripts on the Fish and Wildlife website. But in the meantime, please do consider a written comment or attending one of our other meetings. Thanks so much for your participation

**Katie Cubina** 30:58

Thank you

**Jessica Miller** 31:13

Looks like we still have a few folks. Hi, Allison, did you have a comment that you wanted to submit? Hi, Allison, one last call any comments that you'd like to submit? Okay. Asking to unmute but no one is unmuting. Alison, are you still there? Okay, Allison, one last call. If you have any comments, can you come off mute? Okay, like, oh, Captain Jim, you're still on here as well. Captain Jim, any other comments you'd like to make? I thought he said he had to leave. Okay, thanks Hanna.

**Hanna Khalil** 33:54

No worries.