



**COMMERCIAL FISHERIES
CENTER OF RHODE ISLAND**

Southern New England commercial fishing industry response to Biden climate speech: Climate action must support ocean ecosystems and resource-dependent communities

The following statement was released by the Massachusetts Fishermen's Partnership, Massachusetts Seafood Collaborative, and Commercial Fisheries Center of Rhode Island on Friday, July 22, 2022.

Speaking from a podium at the former Brayton Point power plant in Somerset on Wednesday, President Biden appropriately described climate change as a clear and present danger that puts the health of U.S. citizens and communities at stake. But his proposed slate of solutions, largely focused on further expansion of offshore wind energy on the continental shelf, fell short of the ambition needed to address the problem and may actually endanger coastal communities more than climate change alone would do.

The Rhode Island and Massachusetts fishing families and seafood businesses that our organizations represent are experiencing the effects of warming waters and increased storminess firsthand, and there is no doubt that robust climate action is needed to sustain local marine ecosystems, shore up our combined states' \$3.7 billion in annual seafood sales, safeguard our 81,000 fishing-dependent jobs, and preserve our members' ability to supply the public with fresh, high-quality wild fish and shellfish. But although our organizations are broadly supportive of meaningful action to avoid the worst effects of climate change, we are dismayed at the president's narrow focus on fast-tracking and scaling up industrial offshore wind, which is one of the most ecologically invasive forms of renewable energy available.

Since taking office, the Biden administration has willfully ignored the concerns of fishermen and fisheries managers about industrial offshore wind development, and the President's recent speech perpetuates a delusion that offshore wind energy is environmentally benign. For example, while showcasing the Brayton Point location's conversion from a coal-fired power plant to an offshore wind manufacturing and staging facility, the President cheerfully described the miles of subsea cable and the 2,500-ton steel foundations that will be produced at locations like this one. But he made no mention of the electromagnetic fields that these cables will emit once they are placed underwater, the massive amounts of copper that will need to be mined in order to manufacture these cables, or the disruptive underwater noise and vibrations that will be created by pounding thousands of these foundations into the seafloor.

Similarly, the President's speech touted new jobs that will be created by the wind industry but said nothing of the existing fishing jobs that will be put at risk by displacement from fishing grounds, increased safety risks and insurance costs, and uncertainty about the future of fishery resources.

Across the U.S., fishing communities have called for stronger environmental review of offshore wind proposals, including thorough programmatic environmental impact statements to be carried out prior to

any wind farm leasing or permitting in an area. Unfortunately, President Biden’s recent remarks suggest that these concerns continue to fall on deaf ears.

Announcing that “the ocean is open for the clean energy of our future,” the President vowed to “clear every federal hurdle and streamline federal permitting that brings these clean energy projects online right now and right away.” In our view, federal permitting processes for industrial development on the continental shelf should be made *more* stringent, not easier to clear, and the timeline for development should not be sped up but *slowed down*, in order to allow for comprehensive impacts assessment and adaptive management. The unknowable dangers that ocean industrialization poses not only to commercially valuable fish but also to marine mammals, physical oceanography, avian species, and the entire marine food web are serious and must be confronted before development can proceed.

In the next few weeks, President Biden is expected to roll out a series of executive actions aiming to fill the gap left by Congress’ failure to enact much-needed climate legislation. As he prepares these actions, we call upon the President to redirect the emphasis of his proposals towards the vast array of available *fishery friendly* climate solutions that are available and to prioritize those that: provide environmental co-benefits by sequestering carbon along the coastline, support small-scale energy production that puts dollars back into local communities instead of shipping it offshore, avoid industrial sprawl by leveraging the already-built environment, and prioritize energy efficiency and demand reduction to diminish the total amount of energy production required. Meanwhile, we insist that any offshore wind development that does take place must be consistent with the stepwise harm reduction approach embodied in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which guides developers to (1) avoid, (2) minimize, (3) rectify, (4) reduce, and (5) compensate those affected for any impacts, in that order, with full transparency and participation by affected fishing interests.

In closing, we comment that the Brayton Point power plant site is deeply symbolic of the environmental short-sightedness that often accompanies energy development. From the 1960s to the 2000s, heated discharge water from this plant containing chlorine and other deadly chemicals decimated the winter flounder resource that once supported year-round fisheries in Mount Hope Bay and Narragansett Bay. As happens all too frequently, fishermen’s concerns about the plant’s environmental impacts were ignored until it was too late.

Future energy development must avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. We call upon elected leaders to address the climate crisis hand-in-hand with affected communities in ways that work *for* local environments and existing industries, not at their expense.

For more information, please contact:

**Massachusetts Seafood
Collaborative**
Mark DiCristoforo
marke@maseafoodcollab.com
(973)610-1612
www.maseafoodcollab.com

**Massachusetts Fishermen’s
Partnership**
Angela Sanfilippo
asanfilippo@mass-fish.org
(978)282-4847
www.mass-fish.org

**Commercial Fisheries Center
of Rhode Island**
Fred Mattera
fredmattera@cfcri.org
(401)874-4568
www.cfcri.org