



TO: Protect New England's Ocean Treasures Coalition
c/o Conservation Law Foundation

FROM: Edge Research

RE: Poll Results on Designating National Monument in New England Ocean Waters

DATE: July 11, 2016

This memo reports the findings from a survey of 400 citizens in the state of Massachusetts and 403 citizens of Rhode Island. The survey was conducted between June 21 and July 1, 2016 using random digit-dial landline and cell phone samples. Interviewing was controlled to be representative for gender, age, ethnicity and county residency. The margin of error for each state sample is +/-5.0 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

Summary

Highlights of our recently completed survey in Massachusetts and Rhode Island reveal that residents in both states are strongly supportive of designating protected areas in the ocean in general, as well as creating permanent protections for specific special areas off New England's coast. This support remains strong even when considering economic impacts related to prohibiting fishing, mining and drilling. The rationale in their minds is clear: unique places that support diverse ocean wildlife and are important to the ecosystem are just as worthy of protection in the ocean as they are on land.

New England's Ocean Matters

Residents of Massachusetts and Rhode Island are nearly unanimous in saying that a healthy ocean matters to them. Eighty-seven percent (87%) of those polled in Massachusetts and 85% of those in Rhode Island say a healthy ocean is personally important to them, with large majorities (69% in MA and 72% in RI) saying it is very important.

Most residents surveyed in both states believe New England's ocean to be in good health (55% very or somewhat good in MA and 53% very or somewhat good in RI), while about a third (33% in MA and 34% in RI) think its health is only fair or poor.

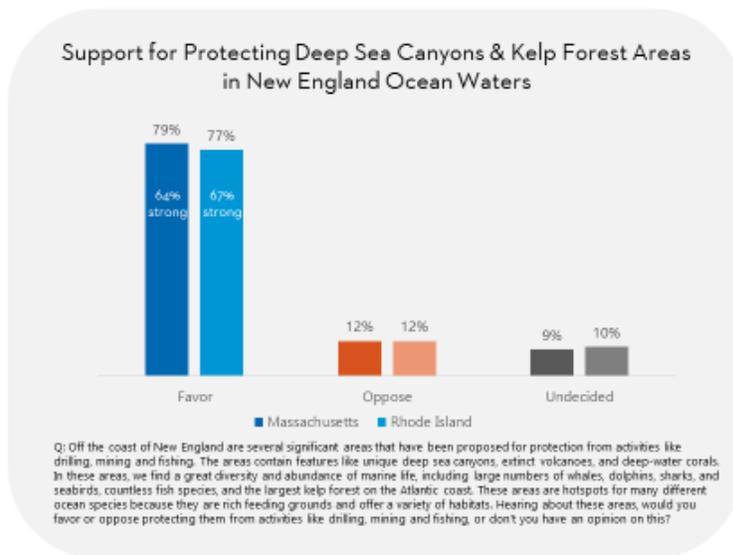
Strong Support for Designating Protected Areas

We measured Massachusetts and Rhode Island residents' support for protected areas in general, as well as support for protecting specific areas in New England's ocean.

Fully 80% of Massachusetts residents and 81% of Rhode Island residents support protecting special areas in the US ocean as we do on land. Very few (11% in MA and 10% in RI) are opposed. Support holds across political affiliations, with 86% of Democrats, 79% of independents and 76% of Republicans supportive of protections for special areas in the ocean.

When it comes to protecting specific places in New England's ocean, residents of the two states are also strongly supportive. Survey respondents were read the following description:

“Off the coast of New England are several significant areas that have been proposed for protection from activities like drilling, mining and fishing. The areas contain features like unique deep sea canyons, extinct volcanoes, and deep-water corals. In these areas, we find a great diversity and abundance of marine life, including large numbers of whales, dolphins, sharks, and seabirds, countless fish species, and the largest kelp forest on the Atlantic coast. These areas are hotspots for many different ocean species because they are rich feeding grounds and offer a variety of habitats.”



79% of Massachusetts residents and 77% of Rhode Islanders surveyed support permanent protection for these areas from extractive activities such as fishing, drilling and mining – with two-thirds (64% in MA and 67% in RI) strongly supporting the idea. Only 12% in each state are opposed, with few (9% in MA and 10% in RI) undecided.

Support for protecting these specific special

places cuts across demographic categories and political affiliations. Among Democrats, 82% are in favor (73% strongly), while 78% of independents (61% strongly) and 73% of Republicans (56% strongly) support protections.

Support for Protecting Specific Special Areas Holds, Even After Considering Adverse Economic Impacts

To better understand the depths of support for permanently protecting these deep sea canyon and kelp forest areas, survey respondents were asked to consider the possible economic impact of prohibiting fishing, drilling and mining in these areas. Respondents were told:

“While there is currently no drilling and mining in these areas, there is some commercial fishing activity. Protecting these areas would prohibit the fishing activity in these limited areas and could result in a small adverse economic impact on commercial fishing. Considering this, would you favor or oppose protecting these areas from activities like drilling, mining and fishing, or don’t you have an opinion on this?”

Even taking this information into consideration, there is still majority support for protecting these areas from fishing, drilling and mining, with 54% in Massachusetts and 55% in Rhode Island remaining in favor. Although opposition increases to 24% in Massachusetts and 21% in Rhode Island, and about a quarter (23% in MA, 24% in RI) are uncertain how they feel, opposition to protection never becomes the majority or even the plurality viewpoint. Across party lines, consideration of economic impact took Democrat support to 61% favor, 18% oppose; independent support for protection is 54% in favor with 23% opposing; and Republican support to 44% in favor and 33% opposing.

Support for a Monument Designation

Respondents were asked to consider different reasons to protect these special ocean areas, and 86% in each state find “these areas are rare, unique, and host to many species of ocean wildlife, and deserve protection as much as similar places on land” to be an excellent or good reason to protect them.

After taking the economic impact and the reasons to support permanent protections into consideration, residents in both states come down firmly on the side of protection. When asked at the conclusion of the poll if the president should permanently protect the areas off New England’s coast by designating them as a national monument, 65% in Massachusetts and 69% in Rhode Island are in support of the monument designation, with only 23% and 19% opposing, respectively. Again, we see support across the board, including across partisan affiliation with 73% of Democrats, 63% of independents and 57% of Republicans in support of the monument designation.