



TO: Conservation Law Foundation

FROM: Edge Research

RE: New Englanders' Attitudes Toward the Comprehensive Ocean Plan

DATE: July 12, 2016

This memo reports the findings from a survey of 1500 citizens in the states of Maine, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New Hampshire, conducted between May 24 and June 20, 2016. The survey used random digit-dial landline and cell phone samples with 300 completed interviews from each state (60% from landlines, 40% from cell phones). Interviewing was controlled to be representative for gender, age, ethnicity and county residency. The data for the regional total were weighted to reflect each state's actual contribution to the region population. The margin of error for the regional sample is +/- 2.5 percentage points at the 95% confidence level; the margin of error for each state sample is +/- 5.7 percentage points.

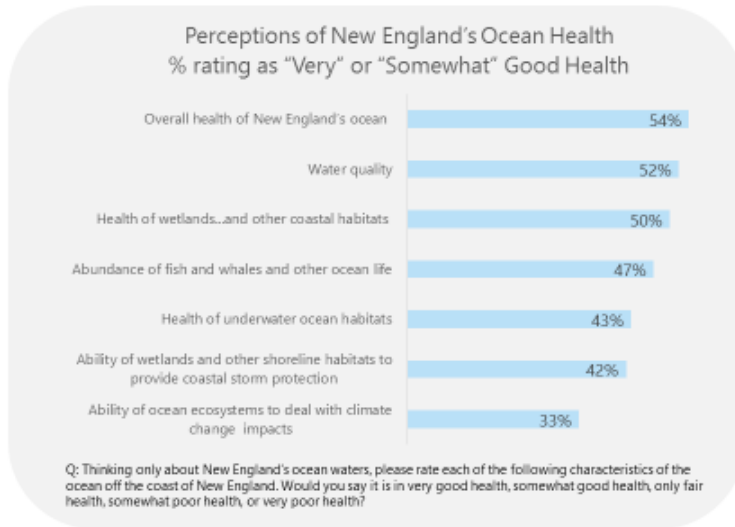
Summary

This survey conducted in May and June 2016 reveals that people living in New England value the ocean, want to protect its natural resources and are strongly supportive of a comprehensive regional plan to coordinate ocean uses and protect the ocean for the future. They expect such a plan to result in protecting ocean water, habitat and wildlife and ensuring that economic uses are compatible with protection. Among the highlights:

- New Englanders have mixed opinions on ocean health in their region with 54% saying overall health is good, but 41% who say it is only fair or poor. Evaluations of specific ocean characteristics are even less positive as they consider specific aspects of ocean health such as abundance of ocean wildlife and condition of habitats.
- There is strong support for ocean planning in general (64% support) and for implementing a regional ocean plan for New England (66%). This support is strong across the board in all states surveyed.
- When asked to consider priorities and outcomes from implementing a regional plan, residents place ocean health, including the health of wildlife and habitats in the top tier. They want to see that coastal communities that depend on the ocean can continue to do so, and that decisions about economic uses are made with conservation and protection in mind.

Perceptions of New England’s Ocean Health – Good, Not Great

New Englanders believe their ocean to be in good shape, with 54% saying the overall health of the ocean off the coast of New England is good (17% “very;” 37% “good”), compared to 41% who say it is in only fair (25%) or poor health (16%). This evaluation is similar to what the results of a similar survey conducted in 2011 (57% good health; 37% only fair/poor health).



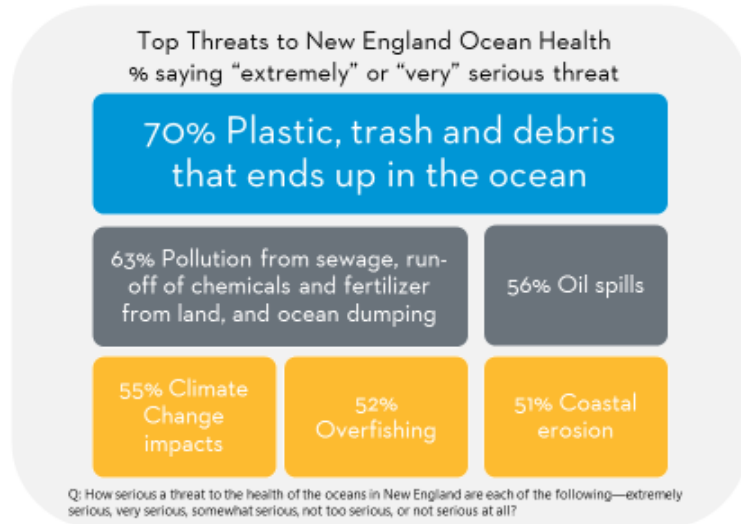
As they consider other aspects of ocean health however, residents are somewhat less positive. Fewer than half consider the abundance of fish and whales, underwater habitats or the ability of wetlands and coastal habitats to withstand storms to be in good health (see chart). New Englanders are most uncertain about the impacts of climate change. When asked about the ability of ocean ecosystems

to deal with impacts of climate change like ocean warming, only 33% believe they are in good health to do so, 50% say they are in only fair or poor shape to deal with climate change and 18% are uncertain.

There is some variation in residents’ perceptions of ocean health across the different states surveyed. Those living in Maine (60% good overall health) and New Hampshire (64%) tend to give New England’s ocean the strongest bill of health while those in Connecticut rate it the lowest at 45% good overall health.

Visibility and Perceptions of Threats to Ocean Health

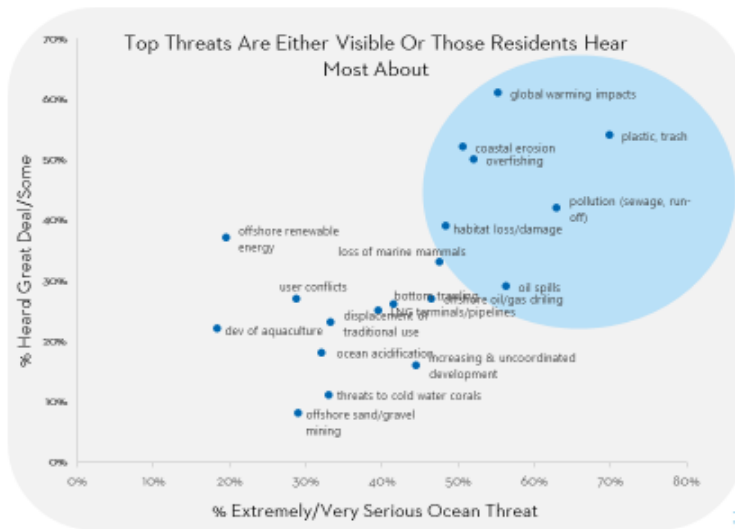
New England residents perceive the greatest threats to ocean health coming from various forms of pollution, the impacts of climate change and coastal erosion and overfishing. Survey respondents were asked to rate a variety of possible threats to ocean health for how seriously they are affecting New England's ocean. Topping the list with 70% saying it is an "extremely" or "very" serious threat is plastic, trash and debris that ends up in the ocean.



This is followed by other forms of point and non-point source pollution such as sewage and run-off (63%) and oil spills (56%). Of non-pollution threats, global warming impacts such as rising ocean temperatures and sea level rise (55% extremely or very serious), overfishing (52%) and coastal erosion (51%) are viewed as most serious.

Forming a middle tier of threats with a plurality, without a majority perceiving them as serious threats, are damage to and loss of ocean and coastal habitats (49% extremely or very serious), loss of marine mammals (48%), offshore oil and gas drilling (47%), uncoordinated industrial and commercial development (45%), bottom trawling (42%) and LNG terminals and pipelines (40%).

Of least concern at this point in time are activities like development of offshore aquaculture (18% extremely or very serious) and development of alternative energy like offshore wind (20%), which is not viewed as a threat to ocean health.



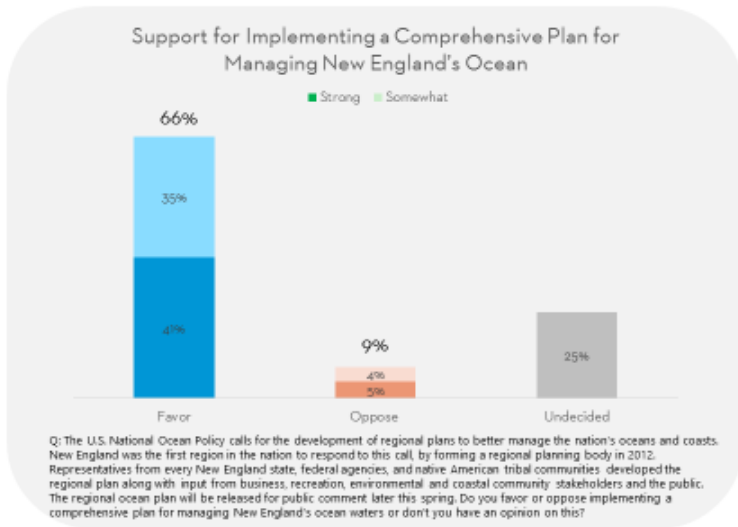
When comparing the perception of various threats to ocean health to the amount that residents say they are hearing about these issues, it is clear that the top threats are also those that are most visible. Whether physically visible - - such as plastic trash or coastal erosion -- or more talked about -- such as global warming and overfishing -- the problems with greatest awareness dominate. Items like increasing development,

bottom trawling and displacement of traditional uses raise concern, but to a lesser degree as people are hearing significantly less about these problems. One clearly positive aspect of development in the ocean from New Englanders' perspective appears to be the development of renewable energy such as wind. This is an issue they say they are hearing quite a bit about, but do perceive current development and projects to be harmful to ocean health.

Strong Support for Ocean Planning

We measured New England residents' support for ocean planning in general as well as specifically for New England. When given a description, "Ocean planning is a process that brings together users of the ocean -- including energy, fishing, shipping, government, tribes, conservation and recreation and the public -- to make informed and coordinated decisions about how to sustainably use and protect the ocean. Ocean planning uses science and mapping to create a comprehensive picture of the ocean area -- identifying where and how an ocean area is being used, and what ocean wildlife and habitats exist there. Proposed uses of the ocean would have to be consistent with the ocean management plan and would be assessed using the best available science and public input," 64% are in favor of developing an ocean plan, 41% strongly so. Only 9% are opposed to the idea.

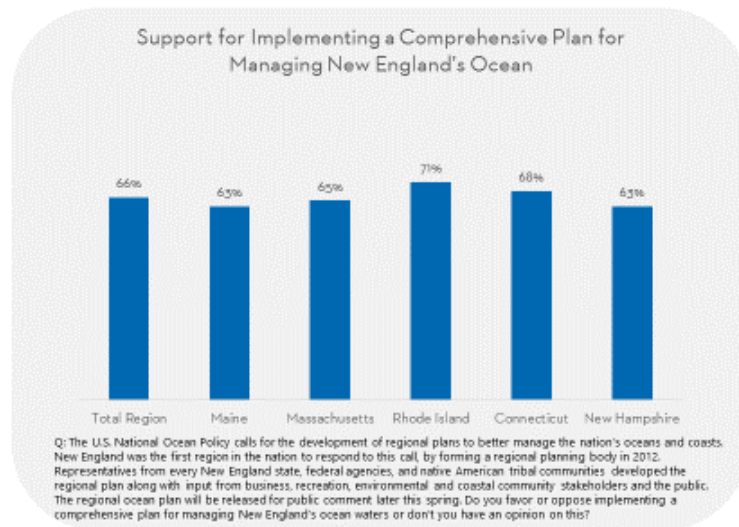
Support increases slightly to 66% (41% strong) when asked specifically about implementing a plan for New England.



Respondents were told, "The U.S. National Ocean Policy calls for the development of regional plans to better manage the nation's oceans and coasts. New England was the first region in the nation to respond to this call, by forming a regional planning body in 2012. Representatives from every New England state, federal agencies, and native American tribal communities developed the regional plan along

with input from business, recreation, environmental and coastal community stakeholders and the public."

Support is strong across the board, ranging from 63% in Maine to a high of 71% in Rhode Island. While support is strongest among Democrats (71%) and independents (68%), a majority of Republicans (51% favor, 15% oppose) also support the implementation of a comprehensive plan for the region's ocean.

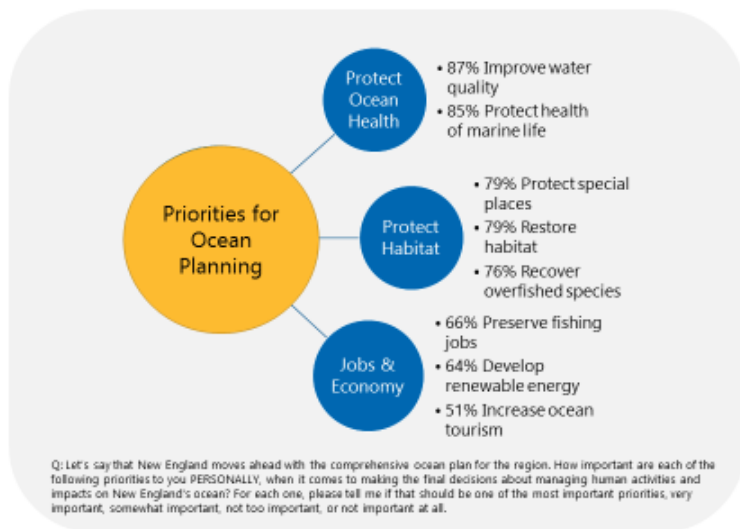


In the survey, respondents were asked to consider some principles that could guide a comprehensive regional plan for New England's ocean. New Englanders feel most strongly that "collecting the best available scientific data and improving our understanding of ocean ecosystems and human uses will result in more informed and better decisions about the management of the ocean," with 87% saying taking such an approach will help the ocean's health (60% believe this strongly). They are equally emphatic that "Identification and protection

of important areas of ocean wildlife and habitat will ensure the long term health of the ocean and its wildlife” (88% believe this, 55% strongly).

Finally, support for ocean planning tracks consistently with polling conducted in 2011. The questions were slightly different but a general description of ocean planning garnered 59% in favor in 2011, while a more explicit explanation of marine spatial planning that emphasized multi-stakeholder dialogue and tangible outcomes (such as “the plan designates areas that are appropriate for various uses and protects other areas”) generated 75% support.

Priorities Are on Ocean Health



When asked about priorities for making decisions about managing human activities and impacts on New England’s ocean, residents are very clear that protecting the health of ocean waters, habitat and wildlife trumps all other considerations. When given a list of 22 possible priorities that could guide decision-making about ocean uses, environmental protections win out over economic uses. At the top of the list

with more than 8-in-10 citing these as one of the most or a very important priority are: protecting human health (90%), improving coastal water quality (87%), and protecting the health of marine wildlife (85%).

Protection of ocean habitat and wildlife also comprise the next tier of public priorities with more than 7-in-10 saying that protecting special places (79%), protecting and restoring coastal habitat (79%), planning for storm recovery (76%), recovery of overfished species (76%), making sure economic uses of the ocean are compatible with ocean health and non-economic uses (75%), controlling development (72%) and preventing beach and shellfish bed closures (71%) are the most important priorities when it comes to making decisions about allowed activities in the ocean.

**Lower Priorities for Decision-Making
About Ocean Uses**
% saying "one of the most" or "very" important

Preserving jobs in the commercial fishing sector	66%
Preparing for the impacts of climate change on the ocean and coastal areas	65%
Maintaining public access to beaches and recreational areas for boating, fishing, etc.	64%
Developing renewable energy such as wind, wave and tidal energy	64%
Government agencies make decisions that are timely, coordinated and effective	63%
Maintaining and increasing New England's ports as shipping centers (and related jobs)	58%
Developing economic opportunities in coastal towns and communities	56%
Maintaining and increasing ocean-related tourism (and related jobs)	51%
Maintaining the domestic supply of oil and gas	44%
Protecting the most important cultural and historic sites such as shipwrecks from damage	41%
Developing fish farming and aquaculture operations	40%

Still important, but far less of a priority for making decisions about ocean uses are considerations involving economic development. For example, 66% say preserving commercial fishing jobs is a top priority; 64% say developing renewable energy in the ocean is a top priority placing them in the mid-tier. However far fewer place emphasis in decision-making on maintaining and increasing ocean tourism-related jobs (51%), maintaining the domestic supply of oil and gas (44%) or developing aquaculture (40%).

Priorities are consistent across the states in the region, although residents of Massachusetts express more concern about recovery of overfished species (81%), placing it in the top tier of their priorities.

Success Should Be Measured by People and Ocean Outcomes

Importance of Outcomes from Implementing Ocean Plan % saying "one of the most" or "very" important	
Coastal communities and people who depend on ocean resources for their livelihood are able to continue to make a living	77%
That the plan includes monitoring ocean health over the long term, using measures of ecosystem and wildlife health	74%
Important species and habitats are identified and mapped so that state and federal agencies can make better decisions about where and what to protect	71%
Comprehensive data are collected and mapped so that decisions in ocean management are made according to the best available science and data	71%
Conservation and minimizing environmental impacts on the ocean and wildlife are the top priorities when evaluating new commercial uses of the ocean	68%
That all decisions about ocean management are made through an inclusive process of state and federal agencies along with tribes, the people who directly use and depend on ocean resources and the public	68%
Implementation of the plan includes planning for climate change impacts and helping coastal communities to deal with sea level rise, water temperature changes and increased storm intensity.	65%
Data and maps used in decision making are easily available to all stakeholders.	63%

When asked which outcomes of implementing a comprehensive ocean plan are most important to evaluating its success, New Englanders want to see that coastal communities are thriving (77% one of the most/very important outcomes), that ocean health is being monitored (74%), that we understand the state of ocean wildlife and habitat to make better decisions about what to protect (71%), and that we are making decisions according to the best available science and data (71%).

Residents also care that conservation and minimizing environmental impacts on the ocean are prioritized when evaluating new commercial

development in the ocean (68% one of the most/very important) and that the decision-making process is inclusive of all stakeholders including the general public (68%). Finally, they want to see implementation include planning for climate change impacts and helping coastal communities to deal with sea level rise, water temperature changes and increased storm intensity (65%). As with other aspects of ocean planning, the measures of success were consistent across the states in the region.