



State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

REPRESENTATIVE ARTHUR HANDY *District 18*
Chair, Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
Committee on Health Education and Welfare
Committee on Oversight
Committee on Small Business

July 7, 2017

Secretary Ryan Zinke
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW,
Washington, DC 20240

Re: Permanent Protection for the New England Coral Canyons and Seamounts

Dear Secretary Zinke,

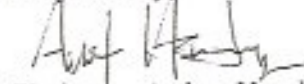
We, the undersigned Rhode Island State Representatives and Senators, urge you to continue to provide permanent protection for New England's offshore treasures by upholding the 2016 designation of the New England Coral Canyons and Seamounts Area as a Marine National Monument. Experts have predicted that the permanent protection of this area will have a lasting impact for generations to come, by helping to ensure the health and biodiversity of the region's ocean waters and sustaining the diverse fisheries that are so important to New England's thriving marine economy and rich cultural heritage. Additionally, many of our constituents in Rhode Island depend on healthy oceans for their coastal businesses, and a number of them supported this historic designation.

The New England Coral Canyons and Seamounts Area is composed of five undersea canyons off the southern New England coast and four nearby seamounts—the only ones in the U.S. Atlantic Ocean, which together support a remarkable richness and diversity of ocean life. The seamounts (Bear, Mytilus, Physalia, and Retriever) and the submarine canyons (Oceanographer, Lydonia, Gilbert, Nygren and Heezen) are home to diverse and fragile habitats, including abundant and vivid deep sea corals of otherworldly beauty—some the size of small trees and taking centuries to grow. The cold-water coral communities form the foundation of deep-sea ecosystem, providing food, spawning habitat, and shelter for a diverse range of fish and invertebrate species. The dynamic ocean environment of the canyons and seamounts attracts an array of ocean wildlife, including tunas and billfish, sea turtles, seabirds, and what may be the highest diversity of whales in the North Atlantic, including iconic species like sperm whales and North Atlantic right whales. Because of the area's remote location, depth, and rugged character, it is remarkably pristine, subject to scant fishing pressure and remains a vital frontier for scientific discovery, with research expeditions continuing to yield new and rare species, new understandings about ecological relationships and renewed appreciation of the uniqueness of these deep-sea ecosystems.

New England's Coral Canyons and Seamounts are striking examples of what a healthy ocean should look like – a thriving kelp forest or a living seabed covered in rare and vibrant cold-water corals, supporting schools of fish and regular visits by a variety of whales, sea birds, sea turtles, and large predatory fish like sharks, tuna, and swordfish. The ecological integrity of these areas make them important to the broader regional ecosystem, help them to contribute to the regional ocean economy, and make them living laboratories for scientists hoping to learn about the health and function of New England's oceans.

Partial fishing restrictions, remoteness, other natural protective features- and now the designation of the New England Coral Canyons and Seamounts Areas as a Marine National Monument- will help to keep these special ocean places remarkably free from human disturbance. There is no doubt, commercial fishing, drilling, and mining fragile habitats like this one put them at risk. The continued permanent protection of these offshore marine jewels from commercial activity will help to preserve them as thriving biodiversity hot spots, deep sea laboratories, and has already begun to help build resilience against the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification. America has a long tradition of protecting our remarkable natural heritage and biological bounty. We thank you for your shared appreciation for our nation's natural heritage treasures and applaud you for upholding the first ever U.S. Atlantic Ocean's permanent protection. Protecting these areas as monuments is very important to many of our constituents, and it is important to us. The preservation of these marine treasures for future generations is contingent on maintaining its designation as a Marine National Monument.

Respectfully,



Chairman Arthur Handy
Environmental and Natural Resources

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