



MAINE

Lobstermen's Association, Inc.

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July 13, 2026

The Honorable Bruce Westerman
Chairman
House Committee on Natural Resources
Washington D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jared Huffman
Ranking Member
House Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: Support for H.R. 9436

Dear Chairman Westerman and Ranking Member Huffman,

The Maine Lobstermen's Association (MLA) strongly supports H.R. 9436, bipartisan legislation introduced by Congressman Michael Lawler and cosponsored by Congressman Jared Golden to extend the period during which existing North Atlantic right whale regulations for the American lobster fishery remain in effect through 2035. This legislation is necessary to provide sufficient time to collect and analyze the data needed to accurately assess potential overlap between right whales and Maine's lobster fishery.

The lobster industry is one of the oldest continuously operating industries in the United States and one of the nation's most valuable fisheries. In 2025, lobster accounted for 75 percent of the value of Maine's commercial fisheries and remained a cornerstone of the state's coastal economy. The industry supports an estimated \$2 billion in annual economic activity and 17,500 jobs within the fleet and its shoreside supply chain. The MLA has worked for more than 70 years to sustain both the lobster resource and the fishing communities that depend on it.

In 2022, Maine's lobster fishery faced debilitating regulations, and associated litigation, that threatened to force thousands of lobstermen out of business. Those measures were based on models that relied heavily on speculative assumptions rather than actual observations of fishery-whale entanglements or comprehensive observational data showing when and where lobstermen fish in relation to when and where right whales are present.

Congress responded on a bipartisan basis by enacting the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 (CAA). That law deemed the American lobster fishery in compliance with the Marine Mammal Protection Act and Endangered Species Act through December 31, 2028, and provided funding to improve data on right whales and lobster fishing effort, and to pursue research on innovative fishing technologies.

With this federal support, the State of Maine established an extensive right whale research and monitoring program that is now in its third year of data collection. The program includes aerial, vessel-based, and acoustic whale monitoring, with substantially improved reporting of lobster fishing activity. It is producing robust, informative data on right whale presence and fishing activity, providing a concrete scientific foundation for a future whale management program that uses the best available scientific and commercial data, as the law requires.

The proposed extension of the CAA's time horizon for a regulatory pause is needed to develop a reliable record, based on actual data rather than speculative models, to inform decisions about any risk posed by the Maine lobster fishery to right whales.

Fortunately, there is time. Recent estimates indicate that the right whale population has increased for four consecutive years as births have exceeded deaths. Mortalities have declined from the levels experienced during the population downturn that began in 2011, when right whales increasingly shifted into Canadian waters where protections were not yet adequate. Canada has since adopted significant measures to reduce right whale deaths and serious injuries.

Extending the pause through 2035 would give managers the time needed to formulate decisions based on a meaningful body of data. It would support management measures that protect right whales while avoiding unnecessary harm to Maine lobstermen, their families, and the coastal communities that depend on this fishery.

The MLA urges the Committee to advance H.R. 9436.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Patrice McCarron". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Patrice" and last name "McCarron" clearly distinguishable.

Patrice McCarron
Executive Director

cc:

The Honorable Susan Collins

The Honorable Angus King

The Honorable Chellie Pingree

The Honorable Jared Golden

Robert Beal, Executive Director, Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

Carl Wilson, Commissioner, Maine Department of Marine Resources