



STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF MARINE RESOURCES
21 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE
04333-0021

JANET T. MILLS
GOVERNOR

CARL J. WILSON
COMMISSIONER

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

Dear Chair Westerman and Ranking Member Huffman,

The Maine Department of Marine Resources appreciates the committee's consideration of H.R. 9436 introduced by Representative Lawler. This bill serves as a critical safeguard for the iconic Maine lobster fishery, the economic backbone of Maine's rural coast, against the risk of potential closure at the end of the current Congressional "pause" established by the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023.

As you know, this bill would extend the timeline of a previously authorized Congressional action to provide additional time for critical scientific research and monitoring data, which has also been funded by Congress, to be incorporated into federal agency decision-making.

The Maine lobster fishery operates year-round and supports over 4,000 individual license holders, each of whom are owner-operators of their small businesses. In many parts of the Maine coast, these businesses are the backbone of their rural coastal communities. In some communities, as many as 25-40% of residents hold a commercial lobster license, and there is little other economic opportunity beyond that supported by this fishery.

The Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team (ALWTRT) is scheduled to begin developing management measures this fall and has a very limited window to finalize regulations so that the fishery can be authorized to operate in January 2029. Reductions in staffing at NOAA fisheries and government shutdowns have delayed the start of the regulatory process, and further delays could risk a complete shutdown of the Maine lobster fishery if NOAA Fisheries is unable to finalize a rule by the end of the previous Congressional "pause."

The Maine Department of Marine Resources (MEDMR) used the Congressionally appropriated funding to rapidly establish a comprehensive monitoring program to improve understanding of right whale presence in the Gulf of Maine and their overlap with fixed gear. We are still gathering various types of data, and we anticipate that several of these data streams will not be able to be incorporated into decision-support tools due to the compressed timeline for

OFFICES AT 32 BLOSSOM LANE, MARQUARDT BUILDING, AUGUSTA, MAINE
<http://www.Maine.gov/dmr>

PHONE: (207) 624-6550

FAX: (207) 624-6024

rulemaking. An extension of the pause would ensure that there is time to incorporate this information, and that rulemaking is based on the best available science.

MEDMR is working closely with industry to prepare for the ALWTRT process in good faith and remains willing to work with Congress and NOAA Fisheries to seek alternative solutions so that this bill is not needed. Due to previous measures imposed on the fishery, right whale population indicators are improving, and we are hopeful that the regulatory process will not be as onerous as it was expected to be when the previous Congressional pause was enacted. This bill would leave the door open, should a further extension be necessary, to prevent the closure of the fishery.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Carl J. Wilson", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Commissioner Carl Wilson
Maine Department of Marine Resources