New England Fishermen's Stewardship Association
500 Southborough Dr. Suite 204
South Portland, ME 04106

June 30, 2026

The Honorable Bruce Westerman, Chairman
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jared Huffman, Ranking Member
Committee on Natural Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Support for H.R. 9436 – North Atlantic Right Whale Regulatory Extension Act

Chairman Westerman, Ranking Member Huffman, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the New England Fishermen's Stewardship Association (NEFSA), I write in strong support of H.R. 9436, introduced by Representative Michael Lawler and cosponsored by Representative Jared Golden, which would extend the existing regulatory framework established under the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 concerning the North Atlantic right whale through 2035.

NEFSA represents commercial fishermen from every major fishery across New England. Our members have demonstrated time and again that they are willing partners in marine conservation and have invested significant time, resources, and operational changes to reduce risks to endangered species while maintaining sustainable fisheries.

The temporary pause enacted by Congress in 2022 provided an important opportunity to gather better science, improve monitoring, and develop management approaches rooted in real-world conditions rather than assumptions. Since that time, meaningful progress has been made. Improved whale monitoring programs, more refined distribution data, updated population assessments, and a better understanding of entanglement risk have all contributed to a far more informed scientific foundation than existed only a few years ago.

Despite these advances, significant scientific and regulatory work remains before NOAA is required to complete the next biological opinion for the American lobster fishery in 2028. Without additional time, regulators will once again face immense pressure to make long-term

management decisions before the full benefits of these improved data and analytical tools can be realized. Extending the current framework through 2035 provides the stability necessary for agencies, scientists, and industry to complete this work responsibly while avoiding unnecessary economic disruption to thousands of fishing families and coastal businesses.

This legislation does not weaken protections for the North Atlantic right whale. Rather, it preserves the current regulatory framework while allowing continued investment in science, monitoring, and adaptive management. It recognizes that durable conservation outcomes depend on accurate information and practical solutions—not rushed regulatory timelines.

America's commercial fishermen have consistently demonstrated their willingness to innovate and work alongside regulators to reduce risk to protected species. Our members have complied with substantial conservation measures, participated in research partnerships, and supported new monitoring efforts. They deserve a regulatory process that reflects the best available science as it continues to evolve.

H.R. 9436 strikes an appropriate balance between protecting one of the world's most endangered whale species and preserving the economic viability of historic fishing communities throughout the Northeast. It ensures that future management decisions will be informed by more complete scientific information while maintaining protections already in place.

We respectfully urge the Subcommittee to advance H.R. 9436 and provide the certainty needed for both marine conservation and the hardworking Americans whose livelihoods depend upon sustainable fisheries.

Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation. We appreciate your continued commitment to both conservation and the future of America's commercial fishing industry.

Sincerely,

John Drouin
Vice President
New England Fishermen's Stewardship Association