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Massachusetts Senate Approves Nation's First Comprehensive Ocean Management Bill

Commonwealth Poised to Lead the U.S. in Ocean Zoning and Governance

September 27, 2007

/Media Contact: /John Phillips, Ocean Conservancy, 617-267-4363

Massachusetts Senator O'Leary and Ocean Conservancy Staff

Boston, MA The Massachusetts Senate today overwhelmingly approved a landmark, first in-the-nation bill to create a comprehensive management plan for the state's ocean waters. The bill now heads to the House of Representatives for consideration.

The Massachusetts Ocean Act (S. 2346), which aims to end uncoordinated decision-making by state agencies that is threatening the health of state ocean waters, is the result of nearly three years of consultation and coordination with scientists, fishermen, environmental and marine trade industries.

Our ocean is the last great stretch that has not yet been developed, Senate President Therese Murray (D-Plymouth) said. "We have well-established laws for planning how we use our land, but nothing for our ocean. It is essential that we put forth a framework and process that will protect and preserve one of Massachusetts' greatest assets".

According to a January 2007 poll, nearly eight-in-ten (78%) registered Massachusetts voters favor a comprehensive plan that would require future development and economic uses of the ocean to be determined by deliberate planning. If passed into law, Massachusetts would become the first state in the nation to adopt a comprehensive ocean management plan.

"Comprehensive planning is needed to restore the health of our ocean waters and we're looking forward to working with the House to build off this momentum", said Priscilla Brooks, director of the Conservation Law Foundation's Ocean Conservation Program.

"The ocean has defined Massachusetts way of life for generations and without action we stand to lose our ocean legacy", said Jack Clarke, Director of Public Policy and Government Relations at the Mass Audubon Society.

"With this law, Massachusetts will lead the nation on providing vision and stewardship of our state ocean waters", said John Phillips, Senior Policy Advisor at Ocean Conservancy.

Specifically, the Massachusetts Ocean Act, S. 2346, will:

Establish clear authority for ocean management decision making by placing oversight, coordination and planning authority for ocean resources within the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental

Affairs.

Create an ocean management plan advised by a broad-based 16-member ocean management commission, including state agency representatives, state legislators, municipal officials, and environmental, fishing, and marine industry representatives.

Ensure decisions about the ocean are guided by the best available science through the creation of a 9-member ocean science advisory council.

End ad-hoc decision-making by requiring that all permits and decisions about ocean development conform with the ocean management plan.

The Ocean Act was written to reflect the findings of the Massachusetts Ocean Management Task Force, the U.S. Commission for Ocean Policy and Pew Oceans Commission.

To download a map of ocean projects pending in MA ocean water, text of S. 2346 (the redraft of the original bill, S. 529), and fact sheets visit:
<http://www.massoceanaction.org/>

EDITOR'S NOTE: A two-page summary of the poll findings, conducted by Edge Research, is available by emailing cdurrant@clf.org
<<mailto:cdurrant@clf.org>>

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