



New England Fishermen's Stewardship Association

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Trump Administration Moves to Buy Back Wind Lease Areas, A Win for Fishermen

By Dustin Delano, NEFSA Chairman and Chief Strategist

For years, commercial fishermen along the East Coast have raised serious concerns about the rapid, large-scale industrialization of our ocean through offshore wind development. Those concerns were often dismissed, minimized, or ignored altogether. Today, however, we are seeing what may be the first meaningful shift in federal policy, one that reflects what fishermen have been saying all along.

The Trump administration, working through the Department of the Interior, has begun taking steps to halt, reevaluate, and in some cases buy back offshore wind lease areas along the Eastern Seaboard. Recent reporting indicates that the administration has proposed approximately \$1 billion to cancel offshore wind leases, including at least two major lease areas currently held for development. These leases are part of a much larger build-out effort tied to an estimated \$25 billion in planned offshore wind investment, much of it concentrated in highly productive fishing grounds. While the full list of lease blocks and final compensation agreements has not yet been publicly detailed, the direction is clear. Areas that were once slated for large-scale industrial wind development are now being reconsidered, and in some cases, targeted for removal altogether.

Many of these lease areas overlap directly with some of the most productive fishing grounds in the United States, spanning from the Gulf of Maine to the Mid-Atlantic. Fishermen have long warned that converting these areas into industrial energy zones would have serious consequences, limiting access to historic fishing grounds, displacing vessels into smaller and more dangerous areas, and creating navigational risks in heavily developed zones. There are also ongoing concerns about impacts to marine ecosystems and fish behavior that have yet to be fully understood.

This shift by the administration represents a critical course correction. It acknowledges that the ocean is not an empty space available for unchecked industrial expansion, but rather a working environment that sustains thousands of fishing families, coastal communities, and one of the last truly domestic food production systems in the country.

The decision to begin buying back and canceling leases signals a willingness to step back and reconsider whether current policies are sacrificing a sustainable, domestic food source in favor of de-

velopment that has not fully accounted for its long-term impacts. It reflects a growing recognition that the balance between energy development and existing ocean uses has been out of alignment. This shift is not just about policy. It is about people. Commercial fishing supports generations of family businesses, underpins local economies from Maine to North Carolina, and contributes to a domestic food supply that is already under pressure from imports and over-regulation. Protecting access to fishing grounds means protecting jobs, preserving coastal culture, and strengthening food security. At a time when the United States imports the majority of its seafood, maintaining the ability to harvest from our own waters is not just an economic issue, but a matter of national security.

We commend Secretary Doug Burgum and President Trump for recognizing the need to reassess offshore wind leasing and for taking meaningful steps in this direction. Their willingness to engage with the realities facing commercial fishermen is a positive and necessary development.

At the same time, this effort must not stop here. We strongly encourage the administration to expand this review to additional offshore wind lease areas across the Eastern Seaboard, particularly those that overlap with high-value fishing grounds and critical habitat. Billions of dollars' worth of leases have already been issued, and without a comprehensive reevaluation, the long-term impacts to the fishing industry could be severe.

Fishermen are not opposed to progress, but we are opposed to being excluded from decisions that directly impact our future. We bring generations of firsthand knowledge about the ocean, its patterns, its risks, and its value. Any lasting ocean policy must be built with that knowledge, not around it.

The decision to begin reversing offshore wind lease development marks a turning point. It offers an opportunity to restore balance, protect access, and ensure that America's fishermen are no longer treated as an afterthought. NEFSA looks forward to continuing to work with the administration to build on this momentum and to keep fishermen at the center of decisions that shape the future of our ocean.

From the Chairman: Dustin Delano's Recent Fox News Op-Ed

By Dustin Delano, NEFSA Chairman and Chief Strategist

The following article was written by NEFSA Chairman and Chief Strategist Dustin W. Delano and originally published in Fox News last month. We are sharing it here with our members as it highlights the challenges facing our industry and the path forward for American fishermen.

I have spent my life working on the water as a commercial fisherman. Today, I serve as the chairman and chief strategist of the New England Fishermen's Stewardship Association (NEFSA), representing fishermen who fish the waters of the North Atlantic and the New York Bight, along with their families, business and industry associations and members of the public who support wild-caught American seafood. I speak for people who work these waters every day and for communities that depend on them.

We see ocean conditions as they exist, not months later in reports. Yet policy too often prioritizes theory over experience and paperwork over outcomes. Commercial fishermen are not line items. We live with the consequences of every decision made in Washington. On the water, those decisions can make fishing less safe, manage fish poorly and drive American commercial fishermen out of business.

American Seafood Is American Food Security

In 2026, it is time to clearly recognize that U.S. wild-caught seafood is U.S. food security. America controls one of the largest and most productive ocean food resources in the world, and commercial fishermen make it possible to feed this country under some of the highest standards anywhere.

At the same time, we are forced to compete against cheap imported seafood flooding U.S. markets and undercutting American harvesters. Much of this product comes from overseas operations with weak or nonexistent environmental and labor standards, yet it is marketed as fresh or sustainable. Meanwhile, American fishermen following the rules are slowly being pushed out.

American farmers know this problem well. Domestic food producers who follow strict regulations are routinely undercut by imports that do not. Commercial fishermen, like farmers, are a pillar of national resilience. Any new food policy must rebuild and protect domestic seafood production so American fishermen can feed American consumers under American standards.

Offshore Wind Equals Foreign Industrial Takeover of Our Oceans

We cannot credibly claim to support domestic seafood or food security while allowing the industrial takeover of our ocean. Offshore wind destroys habitat, displaces fishing from historic grounds and embeds permanent industrial hazards into working waters. It would be like setting our farm fields on fire and

calling it progress.

Commercial fishermen warned from the beginning that these projects would compromise offshore safety. Offshore wind degrades marine radar, interferes with search-and-rescue capability and disrupts military and homeland defense systems. When radar and rescue systems fail offshore, lives are put at risk. Infrastructure that causes those failures has no place in working waters or national security zones.

Once built, the damage is permanent. Taxpayer dollars should not be used to eliminate American commercial fishing jobs so foreign energy companies and private equity firms can industrialize the waters that feed this country.

Fixing Groundfish from the Ground Up

Our New England groundfish fishery is in turmoil. Fishermen face quota swings that shift from feast to famine, often driven by incomplete surveys or outdated data. A stock can be abundant one year and effectively unavailable the next, not because the fish disappeared, but because the survey failed to capture reality.

When that happens, fishermen cannot simply pivot. If the fishery they depend on is suddenly closed and they do not hold permits for others, boats tie up, crews are sent home and coastal businesses suffer despite healthy fish in the water.

Restoring confidence starts with better assessments. Better science does not mean more models divorced from reality. It means cooperative, industry-based research, with fishermen working alongside scientists over time. On the West Coast, industry-chartered vessels and fishing crews have partnered with scientists for decades to improve surveys, reduce uncertainty and produce more reliable management outcomes.

A Common-Sense Path Forward

The choice before the nation is clear. We can continue policies that push American commercial fishermen aside and replace domestic seafood with imports and industrial ocean uses, or we can follow the direction set by the president's executive order and put America's food producers first. Through President Trump's leadership, the federal government has recognized that domestic seafood production is a matter of national interest, economic resilience and food security.

Commercial fishermen stand ready to meet that call. With a clear vision from the White House and policies grounded in real-world experience, we can protect and strengthen fisheries that are already sustainable, restore working waterfronts, and once again make American seafood a backbone of our national food supply. We are a nation of fishermen ready to roll up our sleeves, do the work and get the job done with the president's help, feeding America first and leading the world by example.



Fighting for Fishermen, Safety, and the Future of Our Coast

By: Capt. Jason Joyce, NEFSA Director of Advocacy

Serving as NEFSA's Director of Advocacy has shown me one truth above all others: the strength of our work comes from the fishermen we represent. Our board spans multiple fisheries and generations, and their counsel ensures that every position we take is grounded in stewardship, sustainability, and the lived reality of working on the water.

Forty years ago, harbors like Burnt Coat on Swan's Island were home to a diverse fleet that moved from fishery to fishery with the seasons. That flexibility fed our communities and kept our waterfronts alive. Many of us hope to see that diversity return through renewed access to groundfish stocks — not just for opportunity, but for the health and resilience of our coastal economy.

One issue demanding urgent attention is the push for “ropeless, on demand” gear. NEFSA is the strongest opponent of this technology because it removes the very lifeline that has saved countless fishermen from drowning. At the Fishermen's Forum in Rockland, over 330 fishermen signed our petition opposing ropeless gear — a clear message from the people whose lives are on the line.

For decades, fishermen have survived entanglements because a captain or crew member grabbed the endline and hauled them back to the surface. Without that line, many of those close calls would have been fatalities. When I estimated at a public hearing that at least 100 such incidents over the last 20 years would have ended in death without an endline, I was challenged to prove it. I am asking fishermen to help document what has long gone unreported. Call or text me at 207 479 6490, or email jason.joyce@nefishermen.org to share your story. Without this record, the next

generation will inherit a more dangerous fishery shaped by the shortsighted promotion of unproven technology.

The good news is that recent conversations with NOAA, USDA, and SBA show growing recognition of the safety risks. NEFSA will continue leading this fight, and we urge groups testing ropeless gear to consider the human cost that will be paid long after grant money is spent.

At the same time, we're working to advance another critical issue: the future of the lobster fishery. This winter, I toured Bold Coast Seafood's hatchery with Dr. Bob Bayer and Zach Schmesser from Congressman Golden's office and later met with Dr. Brian Beal and others at the Downeast Institute. Those conversations led to a collaborative federal grant application — submitted March 19th — to build a statewide research platform focused on lobster early life stages and to pilot community based hatcheries across Maine. With support from zone councils, industry leaders, researchers, and coastal organizations, this effort represents a major step toward long term sustainability.

There is no guarantee of funding, but the momentum is real. NEFSA and our partners will keep pushing, keep collaborating, and keep fighting for the issues that matter most to commercial fishermen.

We cannot do this alone. Your stories, your support, and your willingness to stand together are what make this work possible. Our fisheries — and the communities that depend on them — deserve nothing less.

Tessa Brown Receives NEFSA Glen Libby Stewardship Award

By: Shelley Wigglesworth, NEFSA Administrative Assistant

During the NEFSA 3rd annual meeting, the 2nd annual NEFSA Glen Libby Stewardship Award was presented to Tessa Browne of Cape Ann Lobstermen/The Lobster of Gloucester for her leadership, commitment, and dedication to the fisheries.

One of the few female business owners in the traditionally male-dominated Gloucester fishing industry, Tessa's operation processes up to 40,000 pounds of local lobster daily, supporting over 150 independent boats in Gloucester Harbor while supplying fresh seafood to the public and to her restaurant.

A longtime vocal defender of the commercial fishing industry, she actively participates in local policy, including the Gloucester Municipal Harbor Plan, to ensure the long-term viability of the working waterfront for future generations. She is dedicated supporter of NEFSA, hosting a yearly NEFSA fundraiser at The Lobster of Gloucester that is always a tremendous success. In addition to her advocacy for commercial fishermen, Tessa also volunteers her time in the greater community. She has a passion for animals and sits on the board of the Cape Ann Animal Aid and is also active with Pathways for Children in Gloucester.



NEFSA's 3rd Annual Meeting

By: Shelley Wigglesworth, NEFSA Administrative Assistant

We had a great turnout for NEFSA's 3rd annual meeting at the Steel House in Rockland. This year's meeting was held bright and early before the Forum started with a Continental Breakfast by Home Kitchen Café. Fishermen, industry leaders, NEFSA members, staff & board were able to socialize before reviewing NEFSA's 2025 accomplishments, discussing the challenges ahead facing our fishing communities, and outlining priorities and goals for 2026.

Dustin Delano, NEFSA Chief Strategist, Aaron Williams NEFSA President, John Drouin, NEFSA Vice President, & Bonnie Brady, NEFSA Policy Director were guest speakers.

A moment of silence was held in memory of Tommy Williams Jr., Captain of the F/V Heritage, brother of NEFSA President commercial fisherman Aaron Williams and Captain Gus Sanfilippo and crew members Paul Beal Sr., Paul Beal Jr., John Rousanidis, Freeman Short, Sean Therrien, and NOAA observer Jada Samitt of the F /V Lily Jean which sank off Cape Ann, MA earlier this year.



Fishermen's Forum Re-cap

By: Shelley Wigglesworth, NEFSA Administrative Assistant

The 51st annual Maine Fishermen's Forum at the Samoset Resort in Rockland was another well-attended event. NEFSA was there throughout networking, attending meetings and seminars, engaging with the public answering questions about the fisheries, handing out information and promotional items, selling swag, signing up, and renewing members, collecting petition signatures to oppose ropeless lobster gear and to support a lobster hatchery, and more. We were blessed to have all NEFSA board members in attendance at various times throughout the weekend. We would like to thank the following NEFSA staff, board and volunteers for their time and work all weekend long: Chuck & Mylissa Kapela, Pam & George Prince, Sarai Hitchcock, Alison Kanewske Hawkes, Bonnie Brady, Jason Joyce, John Drouin,

Ward Byrne, Aaron Williams, John Borden, Tim Barrett, Ronnie Musetti, Linda Greenlaw, Shelley Wigglesworth, Dustin Delano. We appreciate you!



NEFSA's Ward Byrne Sworn into the Advisory Committee on Marine Fisheries in the State of New Hampshire

By: Shelley Wigglesworth, NEFSA Administrative Assistant

Congratulations to NEFSA board member lobsterman Ward Byrne, F/V Sugar Daddy, homeported in Portsmouth, NH, for being appointed to the Advisory Committee on Marine Fisheries in the State of New Hampshire!

Ward is a married father of 3 who has been a strong leader and advocate for the fishing industry for years. In addition to serving on the NH Advisory Committee on Marine Resources and the NEFSA board, he is also an active member and on the board of the New Hampshire Commercial Fishermen's Association.

Ward had this to say about his leadership roles and why he is involved. "It's good for all fishermen to be involved in what affects us. The more we are in a position to have a say, the more power we have to become a part of the solution."



NEFSA at the North American Seafood Expo in Boston

By: Shelley Wigglesworth, NEFSA Administrative Assistant

NEFSA attended the North American Seafood Expo in Boston and spent time advocating, learning, representing, & networking on behalf of American commercial fishermen. Two of the key issues brought to the table by NEFSA and delivered directly to NOAA, SBA, & USDA were: Ropeless gear is expensive and gear without endlines will cost lives, and 85% of the seafood Americans consume each year is imported. Of those imported seafoods, less than 1/10th of 1% is tested for safety by the FDA. Around 1/3 of what is tested fails.

While in Boston, NEFSA Director of Advocacy Jason Joyce spent time with local fishermen on the docks. "They are counting on someone to save the groundfish industry for future fishermen," Joyce said. NEFSA will do everything we can to ensure this happens.



Fishermen Meet with United States Secretary of the Interior

By: Shelley Wigglesworth, NEFSA Administrative Assistant

Representatives from NEFSA and other fishing organizations were pleased to meet with United States Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum to discuss the future of American commercial fisheries, and the vital role that commercial fishermen play in our economy.

This meeting was an important opportunity for the U.S. Department of the Interior to listen to the struggles and concerns commercial fishermen continue to face from not only industry leaders, but directly from commercial fishermen, to gain more insight on how the administration can better help American commercial fishermen.

Following the meeting, Secretary of the Interior Burgum posted the following on X. "America's lobstermen and commercial fishermen are our 'farmers of the sea.' Most are small, family owned, multiple generation businesses who risk their capitol and sometimes their lives to put fresh seafood in our restaurants and on our

tables-and they deserve all the same respect and support we give our great American farmers and ranchers."





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The Great American Fish Fry: Celebrating U.S. Seafood for America's 250th

In recognition of America's 250th anniversary, NOAA is giving new life to a familiar tradition with the rebranding of its annual Fish Fry as the Great American Fish Fry—an expanded celebration of the nation's seafood heritage and the hardworking fishermen who sustain it.

This year's event is set to be bigger and more inclusive than ever. NOAA is actively seeking seafood vendors from across the country, creating an opportunity to showcase the incredible diversity and quality of American-harvested seafood. With plans to increase ticket availability, the event will welcome a broader audience and shine a brighter spotlight on domestic fisheries.

The Great American Fish Fry offers a unique platform to connect consumers directly with U.S. seafood, highlighting the importance of supporting local fishermen and coastal communities. As interest in sustainable, domestically sourced food continues to grow, events like this play a key role in strengthening appreciation for the industry.

NEFSA encourages strong participation from the fishing community to ensure that authentic, American-caught seafood is

front and center. With the nation's 250th year as the backdrop, the Great American Fish Fry has the potential to be a powerful celebration of both tradition and the future of U.S. fisheries. FMI: <https://greatamericanfishfry.my.canva.site/>

