

# Fishing industry blasts exclusion from Ocean Council

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June 28, 2011 2:00 AM

EXETER — In July 2010, President Barack Obama issued an executive order that established the first comprehensive national policy for the stewardship of the ocean, coasts and Great Lakes. On Monday, members of the National Ocean Council, which was established under this order, held a public listening session at Exeter High School to get input on the nine strategic plans developed by the council.

While virtually everyone who spoke praised the initiative, several voiced warnings and concerns about what was and was not included in the plans. Hampton resident Ellen Goethel, representing local and regional commercial fisherman, questioned why those she represented were not included on the council.

The public can read and comment on the strategic plans until July 2 by going to the group's Web site at [www.WhiteHouse.gov/administration/eop/oceans/comment](http://www.WhiteHouse.gov/administration/eop/oceans/comment).

"What are you thinking, leaving out the fishermen and the (national and regional Fisheries Management) councils?" Goethel asked. "This executive order circumvented the will of Congress (as expressed in the 1996 Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, which established the fishery councils to manage the nation's fisheries)."

The failure of the executive order to include fishermen in the debate over how best to manage the nation's oceans was yet another example of the government's bias against those who earn their livings from the sea, Goethel said.

"From their experience, fishermen know that when they make comments (on ocean policy), they are not taken seriously or used to make the changes that are necessary," she told the NOC members and others Monday. "I see that 'top-down' (policy) doesn't work and what I see (with the strategic plans) is top-down policy."

John Williamson of Seakeepers Consulting in Kennebunk, Maine, supported Goethel's concerns about the inclusion of fishing interests on the council.

"There is a great gap in understanding in (the fishing industry) alone," Williamson said. "I'm not seeing a lot of attention being paid to the details of stakeholder engagement."

Several of those who spoke at the listening session also urged members of the National Ocean Council to, at least at some point, stop planning and start doing projects that will show the value of having a national ocean policy.

"This national effort needs to show short-term successes," said Chris McGuire of The Nature Conservancy. "The pressure is on (for a more comprehensive local and national fisheries policy, as well as coastal wind energy projects), and coastal and marine spatial planning can help deal with it."

George LaPointe, who identified himself as a "concerned citizen," also spoke to the tendency of governmental bureaucrats to spend all their efforts on planning.

"Plan to act," he told those present Monday, "don't plan to plan."

Since the executive order was signed, the council has been preparing nine strategic plans based on the goal stated in NOC information of developing "an America whose stewardship ensures that the ocean, our coasts and Great Lakes are healthy and resilient, safe and protected, understood and treasured, so as to promote the well-being, prosperity and security of present and future generations."

Specifically, the strategic plans involve developing ecosystem-based management techniques, engaging in coastal and marine spatial planning, using the latest information to make informed decisions and increase understanding of coastal resources, and coordinating those decisions among federal, state and local stakeholders.

According to the information supplied by the council to participants at Monday's meeting, five specific areas of activity should be undertaken to support those goals: developing plans to ensure the resiliency and adaptation of the ocean, coast and Great Lakes to climate change; developing regional ecosystem protection and restoration plans; improving water quality and encouraging sustainable practices on land; monitoring the changing conditions in the Arctic; and mapping and observing the oceans and lakes, while repairing or establishing infrastructures that are associated with protecting these resources.

The listening session in Exeter was the seventh held by the council since June 9, and was the only one scheduled in New England.