

05.28.08 - Oceans Bill Signed

Governor Deval L. Patrick
Oceans Act Signing Remarks
May 28, 2008
As Delivered

On Wednesday, May 28, 2008, Governor Patrick traveled to the New England Aquarium to sign the Oceans Act of 2008, which will require Massachusetts to develop a first-in-the-nation comprehensive plan to manage development in its state waters, balancing natural resource preservation with traditional and new uses, including renewable energy. "This legislation will make Massachusetts the first state in the nation to create a comprehensive plan for the management of its ocean waters," said Governor Patrick. "This law will help protect our vital natural resources and balance traditional with new ones, such as renewable energy, that are also important to our future."

Governor Patrick:

The Oceans Act of 2008 will make Massachusetts the first state in the nation to require a comprehensive science-based plan for the management of our ocean waters. Today in Massachusetts, and around the world, we face new challenges from climate change, pollution, and habitat degradation. At the same time, we are seeing new opportunities in industrial fishing, coastal tourism and marine research conducted at places just like this one, the New England Aquarium, or the Oceanographic Institute at Woods Hole.

The Oceans bill I'm going to sign in a moment, and we were joking we have to figure out how to sign it without having it blow away, will establish for the first time, mechanisms for balancing the protection of vital natural resources with the traditional and innovative uses of our ocean waters, like fishing, shipping and renewable energy.

Massachusetts should lead the way in thoughtful stewardship of our ocean resources. We have always had a close relationship with the sea. From whaling to shipbuilding to tourism along our 1500 miles of coastline, our state waters have been a defining feature of our livelihood and well-being for centuries now.

Coastal tourism and recreation generate \$8.7 billion a year in business for Massachusetts. Marine-related construction accounts for another \$2.8 billion, commercial fishing another \$1.6 billion, and marine science and technology another \$1.2 billion. New Bedford is home to the highest dollar-value fishing port in the nation, while Woods Hole hosts a world-renowned center for oceanographic and marine biology research. The point is that if we neglect or abuse our ocean resources, we do so at our peril.

That is why, in partnership with the Legislature, we are putting additional resources toward improving the coastal beaches in the care of our Dept. of Conservation and Recreation.

It's why working with our delegation in Washington, especially Senators Kennedy and Kerry, we have obtained \$13 million in emergency relief for our groundfishing fleet, which has been hard hit by federal fishing restrictions. Those funds should be in the hands of fishermen and their families this summer.

And we are well on our way toward our goal of making all of Massachusetts waters No Discharge Areas for boat sewage, by applying to the EPA to make Boston Harbor, Salem Sound, and all of Cape Cod Bay discharge-free.

This bill is the next big step in our stewardship.

Through the provisions in this bill, Secretary Bowles and his team at the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs will spend the next 18 months developing a comprehensive plan for ocean management. Assisting him will be a broadly inclusive advisory commission of stakeholders.

There is much still to be learned about the undersea environment, and the contributions of our leading researchers and scientists are at the heart of our ocean management process. An Ocean Science Advisory Council established by the bill will help us develop a new understanding of the world beneath the waves.

The bill also launches an unprecedented opportunity for civic engagement in deciding the future of our state waters. Public hearings up and down the coast will ensure that all interests and resources at stake in the use of our ocean waters will be taken into consideration and put in proper context.

In our plans to protect and make use of our state waters, we need to make room for tapping the renewable energy that is concentrated there. Our strongest wind resources are offshore, and the massive movements of water that occur on a daily basis offer the potential of a clean energy source through wave and tidal power. This bill allows us to pursue these opportunities as well, in proper balance with all other important uses.

The coastal waters of Massachusetts are our blessing, our birthright, and our legacy. This legislation honors these truths. I congratulate my friends and colleagues in the Legislature, those here present and represented by those here present, for sending me this far-reaching and forward-looking piece of legislation.

Speaker DiMasi

The New England Aquarium has been an unbelievable neighbor, it's been an unbelievable resource for young kids who come here every single day. We just ran into about 1500 of them, I think, and we could hardly find our way through all of the maze. And it's just, they're fascinated. You could see their eyes wide open about all of the things they're learning about the ocean and about the animals that live in the ocean, and that is an inspiration for all of us.

And I say again, Bud, who's done a great job here, not only at the Aquarium, but next door as my neighbor - I see him all the time in the neighborhood - and he wants to inform everybody about what a great place this is and about the good work they do and he has done a tremendous job and I think he deserves a round of applause for what he does for the Aquarium.

I want to point out that the Governor mentioned a great Secretary of Energy and Environment that we have here in Massachusetts. I too have worked with him so closely, I have such great respect for him, his ability, his commitment to these ideas and these issues. Ian Bowles is just a star to me. I really believe

that he's going to be the one that's going to make everything work here in this, whether it's energy, the environment, whether it's the cost of energy being reduced, protecting the environment. He's my man. Ian Bowles will, as the head of this group, I have full confidence in him coming back with, the Governor had mentioned, being the proper balance of what we should be doing with the waters offshore here in Massachusetts.

So many things have taken place here, right here in Boston Harbor, cleaning up the harbor was the first one, and it has been a fantastic experience just to witness this from my point of view. And that has inspired many of us to work on legislation like this to make sure that we are protecting our environment, protecting fisheries and wildlife, and striking a balance about the use of the resources in our offshore waters here in Massachusetts. And that's to be done in a comprehensive way under this bill.

Senator O'Leary

Let me begin simply by saying that I think the people of Massachusetts have always been very, very conscious of and protective of their near-shore waters. This is, after all, a bay state. But on occasion, we haven't paid enough attention, and there are new pressures, new developments offshore, that are beginning to impact on the quality of that life, and we need to pay better and closer attention. And what this legislation seeks to do is simply force us as a Commonwealth to regularly revisit the impacts of those new technologies that are in fact coming at us. And to embrace them, but at the same time, balance them with the traditional uses of the fisheries, and in order to protect the environment, do that in a way that's comprehensive and transparent. And this legislation seeks to accomplish that. It's not the final word, it's really the beginning of a discussion, a debate, that needs to play out fairly regularly here in Massachusetts.

So I want to thank the Governor for supporting this legislation, my Senate President and the Speaker for embracing it, the members of the conference committee, and the chairman in particular. I want to thank the Secretary for his role, particularly with respect to the conference committee and some of the difficulties we had there Ian, and you played a very critical role, I think, in bringing us together. And I want to thank as well the environmental groups, particularly Mass Audubon, Consumer Law Foundation, a whole group of environmental activists who really were very much involved in this legislation, as well as the fishing industry and its willingness to sit down and cooperate and collaborate. It made an enormous difference.

And then in the end I want to thank the staff, and in particular in my office, we refer to this as Rebecca's Law, and really Rebecca deserves an enormous amount of support. So again, I thank you all and as I said earlier, this is really not the end of this, it's really the beginning and it's an ongoing discussion and debate that we need to continually revisit. So thank you very much for all of your support.