

THE VIEW FROM ATLANTIC AVENUE
By: Alexa Dayton, Executive Director

A bad forecast can ruin a perfectly good day

Imagine that you cancelled your boating or picnic plans for today because the weather forecast called for a hurricane and you look out your window and see that it's a completely sunny beautiful day. This happens, right? You begin to compare the reality before you to the version of the future that you based your day around. On the one hand you may be glad that you didn't risk going out today because of personal and family safety concerns, or you may regret postponing plans and the missed opportunity. Now imagine that every day was forecasted to be a hurricane, but the hurricane never hits. The forecaster has become risk averse, overly concerned about missing a potential storm and has chosen to use the worse-case possible for assumption in their model.

An analogous story unfolded in Washington D.C. this past week with the U.S Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit ruling overwhelmingly in favor of the Maine Lobsterman's Association. The basis of the MLA argument is that National Marine Fisheries Service failed to deploy a reasonable biological model (BioOp) for the North Atlantic Right Whale gear-entanglement risk assessment. MLA challenged the model decision support tool, arguing that it uses worse-case scenarios and overly pessimistic inputs, which bias the outcome and forecast a proverbial hurricane to occur every day. The Court agreed. NMFS will now go back to the drawing boards to come back with a more realistic version of the forecast by 2028, and it's up to the entire community to support this effort and provide data and insight. This is good news for the whales, and the lobstermen alike. Incorrectly assigned assumptions of risks would lead to more whale deaths, not fewer, along with the demise of an industry and heritage. This decision also confirms fishery compliance with MSC certification criteria, an important recognition of the work the industry has already undertaken in the continued quest for sustainability.

Alexa M. Dayton, PhD • Executive Director
MCCF Board of Directors

Joan Sorensen, Chair • Dave Thomas, Vice Chair • Charles Rudelitch, Treasurer • Jane Osborne, Secretary
Marsden Brewer • Michelle Carter • Dwight Carver • Ted Hoskins • Elizabeth Jewett • Nancy Knowlton
James Markos • Sarah McCloskey • Dana Morse • David Tarr • Carl Wilson