



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
NATIONAL OCEAN SERVICE  
MARINE SANCTUARIES DIVISION  
Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary  
175 Edward Foster Rd.  
Scituate, MA 02066  
Phone: (781) 545-8026 Fax: (781) 545-8036

October 4, 2005

Bay State Council of Divers  
P.O. Box 518  
Quincy, MA 02169

Dear Sir or Madam:

It recently has come to the sanctuary's attention that divers in New England are growing concerned about proposed changes to the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary management plan. Dive club and other internet websites are reporting that the sanctuary's new management plan will severely restrict diver access to the sanctuary and particularly its shipwrecks. These reports are inaccurate.

The Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council convened a Maritime Heritage Resources Working Group to advise the sanctuary on its management plan revision. This Working Group, comprised of marine scientists, fishermen, archaeologists, and divers, formulated an Action Plan to reach the sanctuary's goal of resource protection while allowing for compatible uses. This Action Plan was prepared as advice to the sanctuary; the Action Plan rationales and recommendations currently are being evaluated. NOAA has not as of yet released a draft Management Plan for public comment.

By way of context, please note that the sanctuary regularly contributes to the education and enjoyment of New England's diving public. As a major sponsor of the REEF fish and invertebrate identification courses each year since 2000, the sanctuary regularly commits direct funding to enhance diver knowledge of the local marine environment. Each year since 2001, sanctuary sponsorship of the Great Annual Fish Count and Sanctuary Celebration in Gloucester, Massachusetts has brought together hundreds of divers for an enjoyable event that contributes significantly to the scientific understanding of the fishes and invertebrates of Massachusetts Bay.

At this time, the sanctuary asks that divers carefully examine the Working Group Action Plan to familiarize themselves with the issues at hand. Divers should suspend judgment until the draft Management Plan is available for public review and comment in Spring 2006. Multiple forums for public comment will be open at that time and divers and concerned citizens may voice their opinions about the draft Management Plan before it is finalized. The sanctuary will notify the Council of Divers of the public comment period so that all may respond.



During the management plan review process, the sanctuary has been challenged to protect the historic and archaeological value of its maritime heritage resources while finding a means to allow the public (including divers) to experience these resources. The sanctuary views divers as an important constituency and is committed to address their interests during revision of the Management Plan. Please share this letter with your membership.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. MacDonald', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Craig D. MacDonald, Ph.D.  
Superintendent