

Like Seafood? Then don't scrap RGGI, say seafood producers

The oceans provide food for the world. As fishermen, growers, employers, and participants in the seafood industry, we are gravely concerned about the silent toll that ocean acidification has begun to take on marine resources. Seafood supplies, and our jobs and businesses, depend on healthy oceans.

That's why we support continuation of the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI). RGGI helps to reduce carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions from large power plants in the 10 states from Maryland to Maine.

These emissions don't just foul the air. They mix into the oceans and increase the acidity of seawater. More than 30 billion tons of CO₂ poured from the world's tailpipes, smokestacks, and cleared lands in 2009—mostly from burning coal, oil, and gas. In seawater the CO₂ forms carbonic acid. The acid depletes the ocean's rich soup of nutrients that support shellfish, corals, many plankton species, and the marine food webs that underpin the world's seafood supply.

Solid scientific measurements show that the extra acid from billions of tons of CO₂ emissions already has changed the oceans, causing a 30% increase in the concentration of corrosive hydrogen ions in the ocean's productive surface waters. Multiple studies and hard experience in the shellfish industry firmly demonstrate that CO₂-acidified seawater undercuts growth, reproduction, and survival of many species that provide food, livelihoods, and recreational fishing for millions of people. Photos show that tiny larvae of hardshell clams dissolve and die within days in the acidified conditions found today in parts of many bays where nutrient loading from freshwater runoff further aggravates this change in seawater chemistry. The increased acidity in the rest of the ocean may already be harmful to some of the seafood species we harvest. A 2009 study at Stony Brook University showed that half as many young hardshell clams survive in seawater under present-day CO₂ levels (390 ppm CO₂) when compared to pre-industrial conditions (250 ppm).

Even species that can endure some acidification are likely to suffer from the erosion of their more vulnerable prey and habitat. Among species known to be directly or indirectly vulnerable are lobsters, scallops, oysters, haddock, salmon, squid, krill, and corals.

Reducing the emissions that cause this problem is critical if the oceans are to continue producing abundant seafood. By creating cost-effective incentives and limits on coal pollution from utilities, the RGGI program helps to safeguard stable supplies of seafood—and many thousands of jobs in the Northeast.

By any objective measure (and contrary to the overheated rhetoric from some quarters) RGGI works, it does not break the economy, and it does not kill jobs or infringe on freedom. By charging utilities for each ton of CO₂ they emit and providing incentives for cleaner power and greater efficiency, RGGI has contributed (along with other factors) to a dramatic 33% reduction in CO₂ emissions from the region's electric power plants compared to 2005. Has the region gone broke as a result? Far from it. In fact, RGGI has added so little to retail electric rates that most ratepayers don't even notice it: the tab amounts to 0.9% of retail power bills. And there is good evidence that RGGI has helped to stabilize industrial employment in the Northeast, in part by funding efficiency improvements that make factories more cost competitive, allowing them to keep workers employed.

Seafood is a major engine of jobs and economic activity in the United States and within the RGGI region. From the fish deck to the restaurant table, the business of producing, distributing, and serving seafood generates more than \$68.3 billion annually in the United States, much of it in the populous RGGI region. In New York state alone, a 2001 Sea Grant study estimated that this industry supported more than 100,000 jobs.

The Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative may not be perfect, but it should be maintained and strengthened—not scrapped. The RGGI system is a useful measure to keep ocean acidification from getting much worse, and that helps protect seafood supplies and jobs. We urge you to support this important program and oppose legislative efforts to scrap it or withdraw from it.

Sincerely,

Dave Cousens
President, Maine Lobstermen's Association
South Thomaston, ME

Angela Sanfilippo
President
Gloucester Fishermen's Wives Assoc
Gloucester, MA

Mike Flanigan
President, Sea View Lobster Corp.
Rye NH

Mark Green, Ph.D
Shellfish grower and researcher
Peaks Island, ME

Ted Hoskins
Fisheries and community consultant
Blue Hill, ME

Bob Baines,
Owner, F/V Thrasher
South Thomaston, ME

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