I appreciate the opportunity to present this testimony on behalf of Marine Conservation Institute. My name is Beth Pike, and I am a Conservation Scientist at Marine Conservation Institute. Marine Conservation Institute founded and staffed primarily by marine scientists in 1996 to advance the science of marine conservation biology, is dedicated to securing permanent, strong protection for the ocean’s most important places—for us and future generations. As part of this effort, we are developing a worldwide system of global ocean refuges, GLORES, aiming to strongly protect 20% of the ocean’s representative biogeographies by 2030. We also curate the most comprehensive website on marine protected areas (MPA’s) around the world which can be found at www.MPAtlas.org. Our scientists publish frequently in peer reviewed journals on topics related to deep-sea corals, ocean acidification, and MPA’s.

The Marine Conservation Institute is pleased to support the current proposal that would permanently protect an important part of New England’s ocean and dwindling marine wildlife. The proposal, as we understand it, is a step in the right direction towards conserving New England’s vulnerable coral “forests” and other marine life in seamounts and canyons. However, to protect vulnerable kelp forests, beleaguered populations of groundfish, and other unique underwater landscapes, we request that you add
protection for Cashes Ledge, 80 miles off the coast of Portland, ME, and the two remote offshore areas: Nygren and Heezen Canyons located off Cape Cod in very deep water. See map attached.

Cashes Ledge has been described by marine scientists as the last, best remaining example of ocean wilderness near the Gulf of Maine. According to Dr. Sylvia Earle, “Cashes Ledge is the Yellowstone of the North Atlantic.” Its impressive peaks and valleys are home to a number of rare and unique marine species including the Atlantic wolffish, sponges, anemones, sea stars, humpback whales and North Atlantic right whales. Even more impressive, it hosts one of the last remaining northern kelp forests which provide shelter and nursery grounds for important New England fish species like cod, pollock, Atlantic halibut, and white hake. Some of these fish populations are at historic lows elsewhere off New England’s long-fished coasts but are recovering on Cashes Ledge. Hence, Cashes Ledge could serve to boost the numbers of these groundfish elsewhere outside the proposed monument. If re-opened to commercial fishing, this unique underwater mountain range could end up a desolate seascape ravaged by destructive bottom trawling.

Cashes Ledge, the Coral Canyons and Seamounts offer striking examples of what a healthy ocean should look like – a living seabed covered in rare and vibrant cold-water corals and kelp, schools of iconic New England fish swimming above, and regular visits by charismatic megafauna. Cashes Ledge in its current quasi-protected state, serves as a laboratory for scientists who want to understand how this ecosystem
functioned before the impacts of heavy industrialized fishing. Unfortunately, current protections are neither permanent nor do they protect from all potential extractive uses.

When calculating global levels of marine protection using our comprehensive online atlas of MPAs at MPAtlas.org, we do not include fishery management areas because they do not provide ecosystem protection, do not produce desired conservation outcomes and they are not permanent. Globally, only 2% of our oceans are in MPAs of any sort and less than 1% are in no-take marine reserves. In our annual SeaStates report on the extent of MPAs in US waters, we found that the **Northeast Regional waters of the US do not contain any no-take marine reserves.** In fact, federal waters of the United States in the Atlantic provide barely a fraction of a percent of no-take protection with only 0.02% of federal waters designated as no-take reserves.

The history of New England fisheries is replete with conservation actions that are too timid and too late. Many of the historically important fisheries in New England are in a shambles as a result. **Therefore, the risk for decision makers in this case is doing too little for conservation, not too much. Bold actions are not a danger but an eventual salvation. After 300 years of hard fishing, New England seas are tired and need a few places of refuge, especially to create resilience in the face of climate change that has already arrived with increasingly negative impact.**

A monument designation in the Atlantic is long overdue, especially compared to the actions taken by this and previous administrations in the Pacific. This proposal, including Cashes Ledge and all the canyons and seamounts, should move forward to
ensure **permanent and meaningful protection** for New England’s last, best kelp forests, coral colonies, and fish populations. Not only is the proposed monument’s ecological integrity critical to support the health of New England’s ocean, it is also critical in supporting the regional ocean economy, and in providing an unparalleled venue for scientific discovery so we can better understand and monitor the health of our oceans in a time of unprecedented changes being driven by climate change and acidification.

Significantly, the public and many stakeholders understand the importance of this idea. Approximately 150,000 public comments on the proposal will have been filed in support. Businesses and scientists have also weighed in with their support as well.

In conclusion:

1. We strongly support designating Cashes Ledge and all of the Coral Canyons and Seamounts as the first-ever Atlantic Marine National Monument.
2. We strongly support designating these areas as permanent no-take marine reserves to serve as valuable refuges for marine life.
3. We strongly embrace the longstanding American tradition of protecting remarkable terrestrial AND marine places from damaging exploitation.

In recent years, we have made important strides to fully protect special marine places in the Pacific Ocean, including the Northwest Hawaiian Islands, the Marianas Trench, and other Pacific Remote Islands by declaring them as National Marine Monuments. It is time to offer those same protections to our marine treasures in the Atlantic, starting with a Cashes, Canyons, and Seamounts National Marine Monument.
Thank you for giving the public and marine stakeholders a chance to comment on this potential administrative action.

With Assistance of:
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