

Richard Hittinger
326 Thames Avenue
Warwick, RI 02886

August 28, 2023

Mr. Jeff Willis
Executive Director
RI Coastal Resources Management Council
Oliver Stedman Government Center
4808 Tower Hill Road
Wakefield, RI 02879

RE: Resignation as Recreational Fishing Representative on FAB

Dear Mr. Willis:

Please accept my resignation, effective immediately, as the only representative of recreational fishermen currently serving on the CRMC Fisheries Advisory Board (FAB). It is clear that CRMC management, staff, and Council do not want, value or consider input regarding potential conflicts between major coastal and marine developments and the existing recreational fishing use of these shared resources.

With approval of development of Cox Ledge by the South Fork Wind and Revolution Wind projects on Cox Ledge and the most recent approval of Sunrise Wind in a very active area for recreational tuna fishing, much of the existing and long-standing use of these areas by recreational fishing interests will be changed dramatically. These approvals were granted allowing the developer, Orsted, a foreign corporation, to proceed under the guise that no recreational fishing occurs in these areas because they did not produce any data documenting recreational use. I repeatedly called for use of surveys or observation that would identify the level of use in these areas so that conflicts with this existing use could be identified, minimized or potentially mitigated. CRMC never required that such studies be completed, so potential conflicts have never been evaluated. This hypocrisy of this was evident this summer when Orsted reached out to us to ask that we talk with the many boat captains who were running through their area going tuna fishing. They were concerned that all the boat traffic in this area was unsafe.

As you know, I serve as the 1st Vice President and Chair of the Legislative Committee of the Rhode Island Saltwater Anglers Association (RISAA). We as an organization have pushed for more communication between anglers and developers with very little progress. We have asked for fishing surveys using recreational fishing methods of hook and line for over 5 years but these surveys have not been completed. We also offered to coordinate with developers to conduct surveys of anglers who use these offshore areas but got no interest. Our members are shocked at the scale of the current development now occurring on their fishing grounds but are being told that permitting is complete and there is no way for them to have input at this late date.

I have personally been involved with the Ocean Special Area Management Plan (OSAMP) since the early stages of writing the original drafts with Grover Fugate and his staff. We were very careful to include

language in the OSAMP to protect special areas like Cox Ledge but these protections have been trampled by the current Council through the approval of the 3 projects mentioned above without evaluation of alternatives to minimize impacts or to just follow the OSAMP requirements. It seems that the nature of CRMC has changed greatly over the past 4 years since the departure of Grover Fugate. Evaluation of projects such as the Block Island Wind Farm and Vineyard Wind were more inclusive and considered than recent permitting. Even when the CRMC staff made it clear that South Fork Wind was proposed to be located on "the worst possible location in Rhode Island Sound" the final decision of the Council was to approve the project. The process has gone from an admittedly disagreeable discussion to a one-sided push by developers with no requirement for realistic discussion of or consideration of potential impacts of these major changes in our shared marine environment, effectively a rubber stamp of the political desires of Washington DC.

Instead of viewing the commercial and recreational fishing communities as stakeholders who should be consulted and considered during development of marine resources CRMC seems to view us as a hurdle that projects must jump over during permitting. This makes the existence of the FAB unnecessary.

In my personal life I ran three environmental consulting companies. We evaluated environmental impacts of various projects, including evaluations under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). In my experience Environmental Impact Statements for projects such as these offshore industrial projects could never have been completed in the short time frame and with such little consideration of potential impacts as these 3 projects have been completed. The outcome is certain before the evaluation is even started.

This process and the disregard for proper use of the marine environment has been the most disappointing experience of my life with regard to my passion of saltwater fishing. It is with sadness that I submit this resignation but I know that I can not properly represent my constituents in the recreational fishing community under the existing structure of the FAB.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rich Hitt".

Richard Hittinger
326 Thames Avenue
Warwick, RI 02886