February 21, 2020
Environment Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 3200
Hartford, CT 06106

Re: HJ - 1 RESOLUTION PROPOSING THE ADOPTION OF THE LONG ISLAND SOUND BLUE PLAN

Dear Members of the Environment Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. On behalf of the Long Island Sound Study’s (LISS) Citizens’ Advisory Committee (CAC), we urge you to pass the resolution to approve the Long Island Sound Blue Plan. Doing so will allow Connecticut to protect the Sound’s ecologically significant areas and significant human use areas and minimize conflict between these and proposed new projects, allowing for intelligent and proactive management of one of Connecticut and New York’s greatest natural resources.

The CAC works collaboratively to promote and accelerate the goals and actions of the Long Island Sound Study Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP). Made up of volunteer representatives from Connecticut and New York municipalities, organizations and businesses, CAC member groups have a diversity of interests in the natural, cultural and commercial resources the Sound provides.

The CCMP put forth a vision for the Sound “...of abundant and diverse wildlife, of flourishing commercial fisheries, of harbors accessible to the boating community, and of a regional consciousness and a way of life that protects and sustains the ecosystem.” The Blue Plan helps achieve this vision by providing tools to fulfill one of the CCMP’s primary goals: Sound Science and Inclusive Management. These tools include the Blue Plan document, the Resource and Use Inventory, the Map Viewer, the User’s Guide, and more; all easily accessible by users of every profession and interest.

We applaud the Connecticut Legislature for passing Public Act 15-66, which began the process of creating the Blue Plan in 2015. Since that time the Blue Plan team, led by the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection and guided by the Blue Plan Advisory Committee, has produced a plan that is built on a foundation of the best available science and stakeholder input in a process that has been transparent and inclusive of the many voices that depend on the Sound.
A thriving Long Island Sound ecosystem is vital to the regional economy, generating an estimated $17 to $36 billion annually. With more than 23 million people living within 50 miles of its shore the Sound supports more marine events than any other waterbody in the country; we fish, farm, transport and preform vital National Security functions in its waters. Despite this, the Sound as a whole is healthy; the world record striped bass and clearnose skate were both caught here in the last 10 years; we have eelgrass meadows that support the juveniles of many commercially important species; and we find whales, dolphins, sea turtles, and corals in our waters.

The Blue Plan provides critical spatial guidance - coordinated with existing regulatory processes - that allows the State to sustain existing ecological, cultural and economic resources our communities depend upon, while reducing conflict and enhancing compatibility of new uses such as aquaculture, offshore wind transmission cables or increased marine commerce. The Blue Plan Inventory depicts 14 types of Ecologically Significant Areas (ESA) and 29 types of Significant Human Use Areas (SHUA) identified using the best available science and strong stakeholder input. These places are valued and relied on by our diverse communities and are areas where new projects need to be particularly careful to avoid conflict and significant adverse impacts. As a new information source, the Blue Plan helps ensure regulators and the regulated community use the same information applied in a consistent and equitable manner within existing permitting processes. The Blue Plan policies allow appropriate flexibility and provide greater clarity and insight for applicants seeking permits for new sustainable water-dependent activities as well as ensuring federal decisions and projects are consistent and compatible with the marine environment and users who depend on the Sound.

The CAC commends the Blue Plan process for incorporating input from diverse sectors that depend on Long Island Sound. Over 2000 individuals from across the spectrum of LIS users including: aquaculture, marine trades, recreational fishing and hunting, sailing and other recreational boating, commercial fishing, energy and telecommunications, research, shipping, and municipalities - provided insight, review, data, and advice at every stage of development. Over 100 meetings and webinars, both public and sector-specific, helped ensure the Blue Plan is inclusive, contains scientifically robust information and is easy to understand and access through tools such as the online Map Viewer and User’s Guide.

The Blue Plan and Inventory are critically important tools for addressing the many changes and challenges facing Long Island Sound. It represents a collective vision for a healthy, vibrant and well-managed estuary for all who live near, make a living on or enjoy the waters of Long Island Sound. On behalf of the Long Island Sound Study’s Citizens Advisory Committee, we urge you to enact the Blue Plan.

Sincerely,

Holly Drinkuth, Connecticut Co-Chair
Long Island Sound Study Citizens
Advisory Committee

Nancy Seligson, New York Co-Chair
Long Island Sound Study Citizens
Advisory Committee