Week 8: Setting the record straight.

Bill Thompson of Tiverton
Lisa Quattrocki Knight of Little Compton

On Monday, March 20th, State Rep. Michelle McGaw hosted a panel discussion in Little Compton focused on the urgency of supporting offshore wind power in Rhode Island.

The panelists all supported the promise of wind power in New England. Unfortunately, they presented mostly standard talking points or distracting anecdotes, rather than scientific evidence. One panelist recounted the story of a financially challenged man who was able to buy his first house after working on the Block Island wind farm. Touching, somewhat related, but not that informative. Another story referenced mountaintop removal in West Virginia. These narratives diverted the audience from the evening's important subject. A panelist's explanation of Incidental Take Authorizations of whales and other marine mammals as being annoyances, akin to loud music at a rock concert, was a real headscratcher. When highlighting the fishing benefits of artificial reefs (such as those created by jacketed bases of the Block Island turbines), a charter boat captain failed to mention that the foundations of the cylindrical monopiles planned for the 900,000 acres of new development do not offer the same reef characteristics. A more fluid Q&A session would have allowed for clarification and could have placated some of the disgruntled attendees. A reporter subsequently characterized the audience's mood as "seething," but a more accurate description might have been "a mix of disappointment and frustration."

On the day of the event, Climate Action RI (CARI) sent out a group email. The subject line read, "Stand up against "total horseshit" in Little Compton tonight." The classy equine expletive referenced a quoted insult leveled at our organization's research in a recent ecoRI article. The CARI email then described the Green Oceans group as "deeply misinformed NIMBY anti-wind propagandists." According to their sources, we planned to "pack the house" and "hijack the discussion with misleading questions or heckling." A further warning claimed that if we weren't stopped, "the natural world that sustains us, including our beloved ocean, will die." As a small, unfunded grassroots organization, we must be grossly underestimating our powers.

When the controlled Q&A began, several people exited in protest. The local press would have you believe that the malcontents were all members of Green Oceans, but in fact, numerous commercial fishermen in the house walked out. In the lobby afterward, a reporter was overheard describing Green Oceans as "deliberately deceitful." Attacking the messenger seems to have supplanted the practice of debating the message itself.

During the Q&A period, the whale expert panelist asserted that NOAA has only granted wind companies Level B harassment permission, or the type he characterized as "annoyances." Because of the non-interactive nature of the event, Green Oceans was unable to correct the panelist verbally, but followed up with an email. We presented him with the legal documents from NOAA verifying that the agency has already granted wind companies permission to

permanently injure 122 mammals (Level A) and disturb, to the point of behavioral changes (Level B), 245,671 more. NOAA is also currently processing 1241 more Level A permissions and 469,944 level B. Once these take effect, NOAA will have granted 716,978 "Incidental Take Authorizations" to wind companies. The panelist retorted via email, "I stand corrected," but then went on to silence any further discussion, stating "I consider this discussion closed. I don't have the time or inclination to bother with it any further."

Green Oceans approached the evening with a desire to engage and learn. Despite the earnest intentions of our hosts, the evening felt like a missed opportunity. We were, however, heartened by the civil nature of the event and look forward to continuing this important conversation.

Written on behalf of Green Oceans, for more information, please contact *info@green-oceans.org*