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PRESS RELEASE

New Bedford Port Authority Refutes OIG Allegations on Popes Island Marina

OIG Findings Compromised By Incomplete Investigation

NEW BEDFORD, MA — The New Bedford Port Authority (NBPA) today released a detailed response to the Massachusetts Office of Inspector General's (OIG) investigation into the Massachusetts Department of Conservation & Recreation's (DCR) and New Bedford Port Authority's conduct related to the Popes Island Marina located in New Bedford harbor.¹

The NBPA is refuting claims made by the OIG in a report issued on November 18, 2025 which painted both agencies with the same brush as negligent in their responsibilities for the facility. The NBPA contends that the report unfairly and inaccurately attributed various shortcomings to the Port Authority without conducting a complete or rigorous investigation that would have distinguished between the culpability of the two agencies.

Overview

Whatever the OIG's findings with regard to DCR's management and financial practices, the NBPA disagrees with the OIG on two main grounds:

- 1) **The OIG did not develop a working understanding of the NBPA's financial practices or its management of the marina because it failed to take basic investigative steps.** The OIG did not seek to interview any NBPA employees; it did not ask for essential financial records such as the NBPA's annual operating budgets or third-party audits; and it did not conduct a physical examination of the marina. Similarly, there also is no indication that the report's findings rely on any witness statements except from the anonymous complainant (or complainants), whom the report does not identify.

(1) The NBPA has managed Pope's Island Marina for more than 30 years under operating agreements with DCR which owns the Marina's docks.

2) **The OIG glossed over applicable laws that govern the retention of public records.** The OIG claimed that the NBPA failed to produce complete records of its historic payments to the state, while ignoring the fact that Massachusetts law does not require public agencies to retain routine financial records for decades beyond their audit periods. The OIG's conclusions, the Port Authority points out, are based on the absence of records that state law never required to be preserved, rather than on any evidence of wrongdoing.

Conclusions

Given these critical limitations, the NBPA contends the OIG report should not be accepted as an accurate portrayal of the New Bedford Port Authority or its management of the Pope's Island Marina.

"The Inspector General's report simply does not reflect all the facts," said **Gordon Carr, NBPA Executive Director**. "At no point during its two-year investigation did the OIG interview NBPA staff, request our annual audits or budgets, or conduct a site visit of the Marina. These basic steps would have demonstrated that the Port Authority has responsibly managed and maintained Pope's Island Marina for decades."

The NBPA emphasized that, under its stewardship, Pope's Island Marina is widely recognized as a successful, professionally managed public asset. The 198-slip marina has operated at full capacity for years, maintains a substantial waiting list, and has earned "Elite Fleet" designation from Marinas.com for three consecutive years—an honor achieved by only two other marinas in Massachusetts. Slip fees have been held steady since 2009 at rates well below regional market levels to keep boating accessible and affordable.

Central to the questions raised in the report about the performance of DCR and NBPA is the deteriorating condition of the marina's floating docks, which are owned by the Commonwealth. Independent engineering inspections commissioned by the NBPA in 2014 and again in 2020 concluded that the docks had reached the end of their useful life and required full replacement—an obligation that rests with the asset owner DCR, not the NBPA as operator. Notwithstanding repeated warnings and the passage of a \$4.1 million state bond authorization for the dock replacement, DCR has not undertaken the necessary capital investment.

Despite deteriorating infrastructure owned by the Commonwealth, NBPA emphasized the marina's strong performance over the past decade:

- Recipient of Marinas.com's "Elite Fleet" Award in both 2023, 2024 & 2025, recognizing marinas with an average rating above 4.7 stars
- More than \$500,000 in recent renovations to restrooms, showers, and laundry facilities
- \$1.6 million in repairs and maintenance performed by NBPA since 2013, including replacement of 57 of 104 original state-installed floats
- A waitlist of more than 101 customers and counting, reflecting strong public demand

"The NBPA has gone above and beyond its contractual obligations," Carr noted. "The NBPA staff performed extraordinary maintenance and capital-level repairs—including replacing more

than half of the original finger floats and investing over \$1.2 million in storm-damaged docks—simply to keep the marina operating safely.”

“Having led numerous investigations of large organizations during my career as a federal prosecutor, I find it difficult to take the OIG’s allegations against the Port Authority seriously when the OIG interviewed no Port Authority employees, didn’t bother to inspect the marina itself, and neglected to obtain basic financial records,” said **Mayor Jon Mitchell**. “It is evident on the face of its report that at the end of a two-year investigation, the OIG has little understanding how the NBPA maintains its finances or manages the marina. The reality is that the Port Authority’s annual audits, which the OIG never read, reflect an agency that has a firm handle on its finances, and the Pope’s Island Marina is one of the best run marinas in Massachusetts.”

Carr added, “At the end of the day, most disappointing to the NBPA and the boating community we serve, is the fact that OIG, prior to reaching its conclusions, had ample opportunity to conduct basic investigatory due diligence such as interviewing key staff, carrying out site inspections, or requesting relevant financial materials beyond certain decades-old payment records—all of which we believe would have fundamentally altered their assessment of the performance of our agency. There is abundant information related to the NBPA’s financial and operational management which would have easily disproven the OIG’s erroneous assertion that the Marina ‘was and is grossly mismanaged’ by the agency, but the investigators simply never asked for it.”

“We cannot allow an incomplete and misleading report to undermine the reputation of an entity that manages the nation’s leading commercial fishing port and has overseen more than \$1.2 billion in port investments over the last decade,” Carr said. “Our commitment to transparency, fiscal responsibility, safety, and customer service remains unwavering.”

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