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Long Island Newsday

Marine experts: Leave Sandy breach alone

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Photo credit: Doug Kuntz | This photo shows the view looking north at the site of the new breach caused on Fire Island caused by superstorm Sandy. (March 9, 2013)

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Marine experts say a Sandy-caused breach in the [Fire Island](#) wilderness area should be left alone, despite calls to close the gap by politicians concerned about flooding on Long Island's South Shore.

A rash of severe nor'easters -- not the relatively small inlet -- is responsible for major coastal flooding in recent months, the experts said Saturday at a [Bellport](#) forum.

Thanks to the breach, the experts said, bays between the South Shore and Fire Island are cleaner than they've been in years. "The inlet is small compared to other inlets in the [Great South Bay](#) and, as a result, it allows only a small amount of water into the bay," said

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Charles Flagg, a research professor at [Stony Brook University's School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences](#).

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Flagg gave a lengthy presentation that detailed the many changes that have taken place since the breach opened, along with a rise in salinity and a drop in harmful nitrogen levels.

Tidal activity on "the entire coast, as well as the Great South Bay, is going up and down as a result of these large-scale storm events . . . and the inlet has nothing to do with what's going on in the bay," Flagg said.

The three-member panel, which included Peconic Baykeeper president Kevin McAllister and Bellport Village Waterfront Commission chairman Joseph Gagliano, said the circulation of ocean water into the bay could also revive shellfish populations.

"This is a back bay area that will benefit . . . from ocean water coming in and flushing," McAllister said.

The roughly 300 people packed into the Bellport Middle School auditorium applauded the speakers, with some in the crowd holding signs reading "I [Heart] New Inlet." One poster in the hallway bore the phrase "Inlet It Be."

"I hope when it's all said and done, we listen to the marine science people, and not the political science people," Gagliano said.

During a public comment portion, dozens spoke in favor of leaving the inlet open.

But [Mastic Beach](#) resident Michael Hartnett, 54, said his neighborhood has been sitting in water since the breach opened. "We haven't had good dry ground since Sandy," he said. "I would love to see the water clean, too, but I don't want to see it at the expense of my community."

[Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone](#) and other local officials have demanded the breach be closed, citing unprecedented South Shore flooding.

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