

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

January 25, 2013

Mr. John Bullard
Northeast Regional Administrator
NOAA/NMFS
55 Great Republic Drive
Gloucester, Massachusetts 01930

Dear Regional Administrator Bullard:

We are writing to ask you to seriously reconsider your recent policy decision to reject the New England Fishery Management Council's request to implement an interim measure for Gulf of Maine (GOM) cod and GOM haddock to reduce overfishing in 2013. We strongly support actions to mitigate the impact of looming reductions to the projected allowable harvest of groundfish in New England waters for the 2013 fishing season and believe that this specific proposal is pursuant to Magnuson Stevens Act §304(e) (6), which Congress intended to help prevent the collapse of fisheries while Councils prepare and implement new rebuilding plans for fish stocks.

The Department of Commerce has already taken the unprecedented step of declaring an economic disaster for the groundfish fishery before the season has even started. This decision demonstrates how dire the situation has become for New England's fishermen, and foreshadows severe economic hardship for coastal communities unless we act. We are concerned about our small boat fishermen, who are the core of our most important fishing communities, and depend upon species like cod and haddock in the near shore waters of the Gulf of Maine.

For our part, we have supported emergency appropriations to provide millions of dollars in immediate relief for fishing families and long term improvement of fisheries. It is clear that factors such as limited data and changes in the ocean environment are making an already difficult situation more challenging. Significant resources will be required to rebuild a profitable fishery. While we remain hopeful that our colleagues in Congress will continue working with us to pass legislation that includes this funding, we must also explore other options. We believe that the Magnuson Stevens Act provides flexibility to address challenging circumstances like this, and we ask that in addition to reconsidering the Council's request for interim measures, you immediately provide a plan detailing actions you will take to mitigate the adverse economic impacts of these harvest reductions. Such a plan should include consideration of carry-over of the maximum possible amount of unused quota from the 2012 season, greater retention of catch, and reopening negotiations with Canada on transboundary stocks of haddock and yellowtail flounder. Further, the plan should include an analysis of options available to NOAA and the Department of Commerce under the Magnuson Stevens Act and other applicable statutes for assisting individual fishermen, their families, and their communities.

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We believe that such actions would limit further difficulties for the already overburdened fishermen and fishing communities in the Northeast, specifically the small boat fishermen who can least bear the burden of additional declines in available fish. Without swift action, our fishermen are left with few if any options in the face of severe reductions in catch limits.

We deeply appreciate your continuing efforts to work creatively with the Council and Members of Congress to avert the collapse of this important fishery and secure its healthy and stable future. Thank you in advance for your consideration of our request.

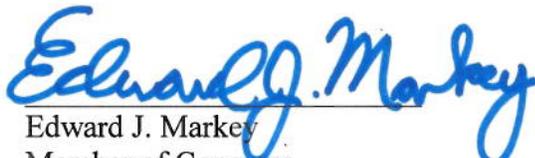
Sincerely,



John F. Kerry
United States Senator



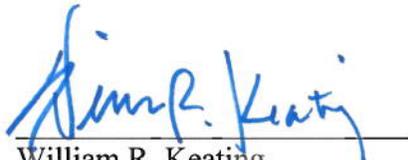
Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
Member of Congress



John E. Tierney
Member of Congress



William R. Keating
Member of Congress