

Craig A. Morris
Deputy Administrator
Agricultural Marketing Service
Livestock, Poultry and Seed Programs
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250

June 20, 2013

Dear Deputy Administrator Morris,

We write to seek your support for a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Section 32 commodity purchase of Atlantic spiny dogfish fillets (*Squalus acanthias*) from fishermen and processors affected by the Northeast groundfish fishery disaster.

On September 13, 2012, the Secretary of Commerce declared a commercial fishery failure in the Northeast groundfish fishery. Today, our region's fishermen and processors are struggling to survive through this crisis. Even though the industry has operated within government established harvest limits, important stocks of groundfish such as cod and yellowtail flounder are not recovering. Codfish quotas on Georges Bank and in the Gulf of Maine were cut 61% and 78% respectively from their 2012 levels. New England's coastal fishing communities are facing severe economic harm, including widespread loss of jobs and shoreside infrastructure, and the potential to extinguish a tradition and way of life for generations of fishermen and their families.

In response to this groundfish disaster, fishermen have diversified their business plans to harvest abundant spiny dogfish. This fishery, which has an annual quota over 40 Million pounds, is healthy, well managed, and recently certified by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) as a sustainable fishery.

Unfortunately traditional markets in Europe have failed to keep pace with production and prices have dropped over 25% from 2012 to 2013. To date, domestic markets are only consuming a small fraction of the spiny dogfish that are caught as most are exported overseas. A Section 32 USDA commodity purchase USDA will help stabilize prices to fishermen, expand domestic markets, and preserve coastal fishing community jobs during a pressing groundfish disaster.

Spiny dogfish is well-known as a nutritious source of protein that is currently underutilized in the US. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, spiny dogfish is a low-fat source of protein that is high in selenium and vitamins B6 and B12. Breaded dogfish sticks are ideal for use in domestic food assistance programs and are gaining popularity with chefs seeking a cost efficient fish fillet.

Section 32 funds have been used in the past to fund farm economic and disaster relief activities. Furthermore, Section 32 funds have precedent to purchase fish, including salmon and catfish. While USDA has not purchased spiny dogfish in the past and may not be familiar with its health and nutrition benefits, we pledge our full cooperation and assistance and we hope you will work with our industry to find a way to move forward and protect our fishing jobs and communities.

We look forward to meeting with you and your staff to further develop the details of this program, so that together we can find a way to make this project a success.

Sincerely,

John Pappalardo, CEO
Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fishermen's
Association

Maggie Raymond, Executive Director
Associated Fisheries of Maine

Ben Martens, Executive Director
Maine Coast Fishermen's Association

Chris Brown, President
Rhode Island Commercial
Fishermen's Association

Rich Ruais, Executive Director
Atlantic Bluefin Tuna Association

Jackie O'Dell, Executive Director
Northeast Seafood Coalition

Brian Marder, President
Marder Trawling, Inc.

Kristian Kristensen, President
Zeus Packing, Inc.

Roy Enoksen, President
Eastern Fisheries, Inc.

Michael Tourkistas, President
Seatrade International Co., Inc.

John F. Whiteside, Jr., General Counsel
Sustainable Fisheries Association

Patrice McCarron, Executive Director
Maine Lobstermen's Association