



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
The Under Secretary of Commerce  
for Oceans and Atmosphere  
Washington, D.C. 20230

APR 16 2010

The Honorable Scott W. Lang  
Mayor of New Bedford  
133 William Street  
New Bedford, MA 02740

Dear Mayor Lang:

Thank you for your letter regarding your concerns about Amendment 16 to the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan, including the science supporting allocations of Northeast multispecies stocks to sectors and the socio-economic impacts of sector management on fishing communities such as New Bedford. Also, thank you for hosting the Northeast Fisheries Summit. The Summit was a great opportunity for all the parties to communicate and share ideas and concerns, and I hope we can continue these types of forums in the future.

I think it is important to note that through Amendment 16, in addition to sector management, the New England Fishery Management Council (Council) is implementing the science-based annual catch limits (ACL) required by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. The small quotas for some stocks in this multi-species fishery result from the required ACLs, not the sector management measures. The expanded sector management program should actually alleviate some of the negative impacts from low quotas by providing the industry with increased flexibility and efficiency as stocks rebuild.

I do not believe that delaying the sector program is in the best interest of the fishery. The Council has worked hard for more than three years to develop this program, with active involvement of the industry. At this point, a majority of active fishing participants have signed up to join a sector. A delay in the sector program would mean all vessels would have to fish in the common pool under days-at-sea (DAS) effort controls. The ACL requirements would still be in place leading to the same low quota for some stocks, and implementing these ACLs under a DAS system would likely result in a derby fishery that would either require very restrictive trip limits or differential DAS counting during the 2010 fishing year. Such a derby fishery would likely cause low prices, increased discards, and reduced profitability for individual vessels. In addition, the investments that have been made by sectors in infrastructure, hiring of staff, and development of monitoring systems would be lost.

At the Northeast Fisheries Summit, we announced that the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) will be ready to implement sector measures beginning May 1, 2010, and we are still on track to meet this timeline. Since April 2009, NMFS staff has been working with sector participants to help them prepare necessary documents, and to ready the monitoring and data reporting systems that will provide the fine-scale data needed to make sectors work. This involved a combination of one-on-one meetings, nine collaborative workshops, and ongoing dialogue to further define industry and agency roles and responsibilities beginning May 1, 2010. In addition, staff completed a series of five port meetings to answer the industry's questions about the new groundfish



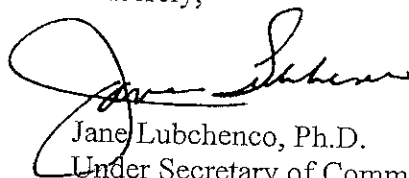
measures and hosted a telephone "town hall" conference call on April 14, 2010, to provide another opportunity for the industry to ask questions and talk to NOAA staff about the new measures. During the fishing year, NOAA intends to hold regular meetings with sector representatives to identify and implement more efficient methods for sector reporting and to respond to any emerging needs of the sector. NOAA will also be working closely with the Council to conduct a second set of outreach meetings with the broader fishing community to track how things are going in late May and early June.

While we understand there is always opportunity to improve and better communicate our science, the data used to manage the fisheries in New England are some of the most advanced and comprehensive in the world. NMFS continues to work to improve stock assessments and will be collecting new information to help us assess the actual socio-economic impacts of sector management on individuals and associated fishing communities.

We are prepared to respond quickly to new information on stock status, such as the results of new assessments on pollock and skates. New scientific information indicates that skates are in better condition than previously thought, and NMFS is working with Council staff to quickly incorporate this new information into management action. In addition, if this summer's pollock assessment indicates that changes in annual catch limits are appropriate, we will work with the Council to make changes in the most expeditious manner possible. I also understand the Council intends to begin work on extension of the Georges Bank yellowtail flounder rebuilding program. This action may provide some relief to industry while maintaining rebuilding progress on this stock.

I appreciate your involvement and interest in New England's fisheries, and hope that we can work collaboratively to manage these fisheries for the good of the fish, the fishers and fishing communities, and the Nation. If you have further questions, please contact John Gray, Director of NOAA's Office of Legislative Affairs, at (202) 482-4981.

Sincerely,



Jane Lubchenco, Ph.D.  
Under Secretary of Commerce  
for Oceans and Atmosphere