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LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

July 16, 2010

The Honorable Gary Locke, Secretary  
United States Department of Commerce  
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Locke:

On several occasions, I have met with fishermen and their families in New Bedford, Gloucester and other fishing communities in the Commonwealth. They have shared with me the crushing impact of federal fishing regulations on their way of life in the last several years.

While in one such meeting in Gloucester this past Wednesday, we received word of your emergency action to raise the catch limits on pollock, one of the choke species that has raised concern among the groundfish community. Thank you so much for that. You clearly appreciate and acknowledge the economic stress fishermen are under. But we must do more.

Massachusetts fishermen are fighting for their survival. The transition to catch shares, a difficult transition in the best of circumstances, has been made more economically devastating by NOAA's insistence on unnecessarily steep cuts in annual fishing limits. We understand and support the mandates of the Magnuson Stevens Act to rebuild stocks; but at every turn NOAA has made choices that have failed to offer needed flexibility during this transition.

To bring immediate relief to these families, and to prevent the collapse of the Commonwealth's fishing industry, I request the following immediate actions:

First, raise catch limits on the remaining groundfish species to the upper end of NOAA's current, published acceptable range. The current fishing levels are unnecessarily cautious. Our fishermen cannot survive another two years before NOAA adjusts catch limits for these other species.

In addition to raising fishing limits on other groundfish, NOAA should review the methodology of the allocation used to determine whether it was fair to the participants. In particular, the use of only a single factor -- the 1996-2006 base years -- to determine fishing history for allocations has left some smaller boat fishermen with an unfair share of the catch.

Second, provide emergency economic relief to our fishing communities. Some sector fishermen will not be economically viable. NMFS acknowledges that consolidation will occur. NMFS has not yet undertaken a full socioeconomic analysis to guide how the federal government can help fishing communities transition to a new future when stocks are fully rebuilt. In the mean time we seek emergency economic relief that can either provide the bridge to that future, or allow fishermen to securely leave the industry if they chose.

Third, fully fund our request of June 2009 seeking \$3.2 million for a cooperative groundfish survey of fish stocks and an investigation of innovative gear technology that can reduce by-catch. This request for better joint science is aimed at addressing the central reason for the mistrust that exists within the industry toward the federal government and is strongly supported by all stakeholders, including environmentalists. It will provide new conservation gear research developed in cooperation with fisherman to reduce bycatch to lower stock assessment uncertainty and assist rebuilding efforts. In addition, funding the cooperative research will allow fishermen with low quotas associated with their permits to be able to work in marine research while the fishery continues to rebuild. Such funding will increase understanding about the condition of fishery resources, make data reporting for sectors more timely and accurate, and build public


The Honorable Gary Locke, Secretary  
July 16, 2010  
Page Three

confidence in the conservation programs that form the basis of our marine fishing economy.

Fourth, release NOAA funds already allocated to help with administrative costs of running sectors, but that are yet to be distributed (\$500,000-\$700,000). Such funds would be used to cover administrative costs for operating sectors, data monitoring, and reporting requirements. Again, for the transition to the new system of catch shares to work, managers must be given greater support.

I respectfully ask for your leadership to address this crisis in Massachusetts. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gary Locke", written over a large, light-colored oval scribble.

cc: Senator John Kerry  
Senator Scott Brown  
Representative Michael Capuano  
Representative Barney Frank  
Representative James McGovern  
Representative John Tierney  
Senate President Therese Murray  
Speaker Robert DeLeo  
Senator Mark Montigny  
Senator Bruce Tarr  
Representative Antonio F.D. Cabral  
Representative Stephen R. Canessa  
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Undersecretary Jane Lubchenco  
Assistant Administrator Eric Schwaab  
Regional Administrator Patricia Kurkul  
Chairman John Pappalardo, New England Fishery Management Council  
Secretary Ian Bowles  
Commissioner Mary Griffin  
Director Paul Diodati