

NORTHEAST SEAFOOD COALITION

March 26, 2012

The Honorable Paul LePage,
Governor of Maine

The Honorable Dan Malloy,
Governor of Connecticut

The Honorable John Lynch,
Governor of New Hampshire

The Honorable Andrew Cuomo,
Governor of New York

The Honorable Deval Patrick,
Governor of Massachusetts

The Honorable Chris Christie,
Governor of New Jersey

The Honorable Lincoln Chafee,
Governor of Rhode Island

Dear Governors:

The Northeast Seafood Coalition (NSC) proudly represents a large number of trawl, gillnet and hook groundfish fishermen operating from ports in Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York and New Jersey.

Working cooperatively with other industry associations in the region, the New England Fishery Management Council, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), the scientific community and other stakeholders, we have been deeply involved in the process of addressing the crisis facing many of our fishermen due to the unexpected results of the recent stock assessment for Gulf of Maine cod.

Although this effort has taken us a long way from the very worst case scenario of a complete fishery shutdown, it appears certain now that the catch level for fishing year 2012 beginning on May 1, 2012, will result in the collapse of many small business fishing operations. This holds true for all vessel sizes and fishing gears throughout the region. This is truly a regional crisis.

With this in mind, we feel strongly that this crisis requires a coordinated regional response by all affected states. Please recall that section 312 (a) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (16 U.S.C. 1861a(a)) sets forth a process for the Governors of affected states to request a determination by the Secretary of Commerce of a commercial fishery failure due to a fishery resource disaster. Pursuant to such a determination, the Secretary is authorized to provide financial assistance to the affected states to assess and mitigate the economic and social impacts of the fishery failure.

We are advised by NMFS that it will issue an interim catch limit for Gulf of Maine cod for fishing year 2012 very soon. NMFS is expected to choose a catch limit at the low end of the Council's recommended range of 6700mt to 7500mt. While the higher the catch limit NMFS issues the less the impacts will be, of course, we still fully expect the economic and social impacts of this catch limit on our fishermen and communities will be so great that they will meet the statutory requirements for the Secretary to make such a determination.

Thus, we respectfully request a coordinated, regional effort by all of the affected states to request a determination by the Secretary of a commercial fishery failure in the groundfish fishery due to the Gulf of Maine cod resource disaster.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jackie Odell

Jackie Odell
Executive Director