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TIMOTHY P. MURRAY
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April 22, 2013

The Honorable Rebecca Blank
Acting Secretary of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Acting Secretary Blank:

I urge you to work with and encourage the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to take critical and balanced actions during this time of regional and national fishery crisis. As you are well aware, New England fishermen, as well as those in the Gulf Coast and Pacific Northwest, are facing near catastrophic economic conditions. Despite the Department of Commerce's emergency declaration last year, sufficient relief still has not been provided.

In your letter to me last September, you stated that you were deeply concerned about the potential impacts of the 2013 catch limits and that you would continue to work with NOAA, the New England Fisheries Management Council, and the fishing industry to explore all possible options to mitigate these impacts. While I continue to work with our Congressional partners to secure the emergency funding that our fishermen need and deserve, I ask that you honor this commitment and urge NOAA to take all actions at its disposal to provide immediate assistance in advance of the May 1st cuts.

Specifically, I ask that you approve and implement the request for interim measures submitted by the New England Fishery Management

Council to NOAA fisheries in December to allow for a more gradual approach on Gulf of Maine cod and haddock that would maintain both the short and long term viability of our fishing industry. I agree with the New England Fishery Management Council that there is sufficient flexibility in the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act to implement a second interim action on Gulf of Maine cod. Therefore, I do not believe a change of circumstances creating a new emergency situation is necessary for you to take this action. This is an ongoing emergency situation and should be treated as such. While ending overfishing is important, reducing overfishing for another year is a far better and more equitable alternative for our fishermen as they attempt to adjust to this dire situation for which they are not at fault. Our Congressional delegation, Attorney General, and over sixty Massachusetts legislators agree that an interim measure is the most appropriate course of action at this time.

NOAA should also invest immediately in the safety and sustainability of our fishing fleet, provide job training for fishermen to help them adjust to changes in fishery management, provide support for sector operating and at-sea monitoring costs, and promote cooperative research focused on improving stock assessments and data collection systems. In addition, with the livelihood of our fishing communities at stake, I encourage NOAA to support much needed improvements in fisheries science. While we wait for Congress to act, NOAA can and should take these steps to alleviate the impact of this crisis.

Thank you in advance for working with NOAA to take immediate action on these targeted steps that will allow the groundfish fleet to survive and become more sustainable in the years ahead.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Rebecca Blank", is written below the word "Sincerely,". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the beginning and a long, sweeping tail.