

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 18, 2013

Mr. John K. Bullard
Regional Administrator
National Marine Fisheries Service
55 Great Republic Drive
Gloucester, MA 01930

Mr. C. M. "Rip" Cunningham
Chairman
New England Fishery Management Council
50 Water Street
Newburyport, MA 01950

Dear Administrator Bullard and Chairman Cunningham:

As elected officials in Atlantic coastal districts and states, we take a strong interest in preserving our maritime heritage and sustaining diverse coastal economies. We are proud of our fishing communities and, particularly, the hard-working men and women who have chosen fishing as a way of life. Many of these fishing families and businesses in the Mid-Atlantic and New England regions have been struggling with a consistent pattern of major harvest reductions, even as many other sectors of our economy are beginning to recover.

Over the past decade, however, one fishery has provided a steady source of income and support for fishing community infrastructure, as well as a model of positive cooperative fishery management: the Atlantic scallop fishery. However, even the scallop industry is facing major harvest reductions, stemming at least in part from the continued closure of certain historic fishing grounds on the Northern Edge of Georges Bank. Federal and cooperative surveys show the closed portion of the Northern Edge alone contains approximately 30 million pounds of harvestable scallops, valued at over \$300 million at today's market prices.

We understand the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) are currently nearing the conclusion of a lengthy effort to develop what is known as the Omnibus Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Amendment. This action is designed to meet the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act's (MSA) requirement that adverse impacts of fishing on such habitat be minimized "to the extent practicable." As you work to conclude the Omnibus EFH Amendment process, we urge you to consider the potential adverse impacts (or foregone opportunities) on fishing communities and loss of sustainable scallop yield that providing or maintaining access to fishing grounds would otherwise provide, as well as reasonable conservation needs.

As part of the Omnibus EFH Amendment process, fishery managers are evaluating whether to re-open areas that have been closed to fishing for nearly twenty years, including the Northern Edge area referenced above. It is our understanding that a wealth of new habitat and fishery abundance information - much of it obtained through cooperative research led by the scallop industry and its academic partners - has become available since the closures were first enacted. We encourage you to use this information to inform your decisions regarding the impact on fish habitat.

Additionally, we have been informed that new areas are being considered for long-term EFH closure, such as historically productive fishing and scalloping grounds in the Great South Channel, located to the south and west of Georges Bank. Closures are also being debated for other areas along the Northern Edge that are currently open to fishing. High levels of quality scallop abundance in the Great South Channel and in the open areas of the Northern Edge are helping to support robust scallop landings this year, despite current conservation cut-backs.

Fish habitat and abundance are not the only issues at stake. We understand that areas such as the Northern Edge offer opportunities to harvest scallops and haddock with lower levels of bycatch of depleted species such as yellowtail flounder. Harvesting more target species with lower bycatch enables more seafood and dollars to flow into the economy, and conservation goals to be more efficiently met.

The MSA requires NMFS and its regional councils to balance conservation and community considerations, and to use the best scientific and economic information available. Thus, we respectfully ask that you support our fishing communities by providing the scallop fishery's access to its historic fishing grounds on Georges Bank and in the Great South Channel, while continuing necessary habitat protection for groundfish. We thank you in advance for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,



William R. Keating
Member of Congress




Frank A. LoBiondo
Member of Congress



Edward J. Markey
Member of Congress



Jon Runyan
Member of Congress



Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress



Robert J. Wittman
Member of Congress

Joe Courtney
Joe Courtney
Member of Congress

Carol Shea-Porter
Carol Shea-Porter
Member of Congress