



CITY OF NEW BEDFORD

SCOTT W. LANG, MAYOR

August 4, 2010

The Honorable Gary Locke, Secretary
Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Locke:

Thank you for your letter of July 21, 2010. With great respect and in the spirit of a true partnership, I must inform you that your letter reinforces my belief that the catch share program was put in place prematurely, without the planning, analysis, and exploration of alternatives commonly required in major federal actions. Without these good public policy practices, we have no idea where the catch share program is taking us. Shortfalls in planning are already generating unfair treatment, job loss, welfare costs, and resource waste. I know you also believe that added costs, and job loss are not acceptable in these troubled economic times.

If we are to find common ground, then we need to have a common view of reality and accountability. We are appreciative of various species increased limits, but feel that these fall short of the need to review the entire suite of stock assessments, as well as a need to come to grips with the general direction of the catch share program. It is important to demonstrate to the public that the catch shares is not a cut-and-paste plan-as-you-go exercise without a recognition by the agency of the dire economic and employment climate that exists in New England.

For example, pollock has been known as a choke species for a long time. Quotas of pollock were given to the common pool at the point in time when fishermen had to choose between the common pool and sectors. After the Agency announced quotas in pollock, cod, and yellowtail, the quotas were cut in half, forcing those that were stranded by electing the common pool, into sectors. These reductions in pollock quota were made because the stock of pollock was being managed under the original stock assessment. But a few months later it is discovered that the pollock quota should be six times larger. Why with the obvious importance of pollock was it not subject to the same scientific assessment that revealed it was six times more abundant than originally thought, before the initiation of the catch share program? In reality, catch shares never should have not been implemented without current stock assessments being ready.

In this regard, if the original pollock assessments are troubling, then we would find the skate analysis even more scientifically conflicted. As you know, skate was being fished at a limit of 20,000 pounds per trip—then it was reduced to 1900 pounds—and then after some complaints and more “analysis” increased to 5000 pounds. We all wonder whether a more scientifically appropriate analysis would result in a

multi-fold increase in skate allocations. Skate is one of the critical species for New Bedford and skate alone employs hundreds of workers.

Please also know that your reference to dogfish and red crab limits do not support NOAA's assessment capabilities. The recovery of the spiny dogfish has been known for some time, and the lower limit for red crab was established because of an error in the analysis by NOAA. The assessment failed to take into account the fact that recent limits were not established for biological reasons, but because a major buyer substantially reduced their orders, and so a lesser quantity of red crab was landed.

With regard to indicators of success, good public policy would require *forecasts* of the performance of the program before it is promulgated. A lack of forecasts means that we do not know the likelihood of success. Adding to this problem is the fact that we do not seem to know how the program is performing in contemporary time. You state the catch this year is on par with the catch last year. But the Gloucester Daily Times reported that "Over the first 21 percent of the fishing season — May 1 through July 17 — the part of the fleet organized into sectors had landed only 6.5 percent of what it was allocated to catch for the year in the mixed groundfish stock complex." However, even if this season's landings matches last year's catch for this time frame, this is hardly a success when we realize that last years catch was only about 20% of the TAC available last year. It seems clear that catch shares this year are performing no better than days-at-sea did last year. Of course, a better metric would involve the percentage of the quotas that are already used. For example, if we have now caught as much cod as we had last year but our current cod quota is used up, then our cod catch will be materially less than last year.


Regarding a buyback program, at present it is my understanding that there is no money budgeted to support a buyback. Perhaps any additional appropriated money may be invested in buybacks, or in the improvement of the catch share system and correcting the inequity of the initial allocations. A buyback program must be carefully thought out and implemented with precision, otherwise dire unintended economic and social harm will be the end result of such a program.

Lastly, we appreciate your support of cooperative research programs. It is critical that these programs be designed to support fishery management and address current issues. A coherent program focused on the needs of managers and scientists must be developed as a long lasting partnership between the government, the private sector and the institutions of higher learning in our region.

I look forward to working with you and NOAA to develop appropriate management programs which empowers the private sector and our scientist in this most important task.

Best regards, and at your service.

Sincerely,



Scott W. Lang
Mayor