

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 16, 2011

The Honorable John Bryson, Secretary
Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Bryson:

We are writing to request that the National Marine Fisheries Service conduct an emergency assessment for Gulf of Maine cod. Additionally, we ask that you exercise the authority granted to your office under section 305(c)(1) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and promulgate an emergency regulation freezing the Gulf of Maine cod allocation catch limit (ACL) until a new stock assessment has been completed.

The results of the recent National Marine Fisheries Service Gulf of Maine cod assessment have greatly deviated from previous stock surveys. As you know, NOAA set a 2014 deadline to rebuild the Gulf of Maine cod species, and the agency's 2008 assessment suggested that species was on trajectory to meet that rebuilding deadline. The new survey surprisingly claims that Gulf of Maine cod stocks are down to roughly one-third the levels that were previously reported. These results are directly contradicted by fishermen who are finding an abundance Gulf of Maine cod during their trips. Additionally, this is not the first instance where the agency may have conducted a stock assessment that was later proven to be mistaken. In 2009, the agency recognized that its 2008 survey for Pollock was deeply flawed and to the agency's credit, it conducted an expedited new assessment that resulted in the Pollock ACL being increase by five hundred percent.

A restrictive allocation for Gulf of Maine cod will prevent fishermen from harvesting abundant groundfish species such as haddock and will have a devastating economic impact on coastal communities that are already experiencing severe hardship. We strongly urge you to immediately initiate a stock assessment and freeze the ACL for Gulf of Maine cod until the new survey has been completed.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of our request, and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,


BARNEY FRANK


JOHN TIERNEY

Frank Guinta

FRANK GUINTA

William R. Keating

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Michael X. Michaud

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