



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
1335 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910
THE DIRECTOR

JAN -9 2012

The Honorable Olympia J. Snowe
Unites States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Snowe:

Thank you for your letter regarding the recent Gulf of Maine cod assessment. We certainly share your concern with the emerging assessment results and are committed to aggressively evaluating the science, developing management responses, and taking action to help fishermen and fishing communities. I also share your frustration about the lack of progress in rebuilding the fishery despite the industry's compliance with imposed science-based catch levels.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is taking an unprecedented approach to evaluate the Gulf of Maine cod stocks and help the fishermen whose livelihoods depend on it. We are working closely with the New England Fishery Management Council (Council) to undertake as much advance planning as possible, and have met with fishermen throughout the region to inform them of the current situation and get their views on how to address it. In short, we are doing everything possible to manage this situation effectively and look forward to continuing to work closely with you and the fishing community as we proceed.

I agree with you that it is critical that we broadly and clearly communicate the assessment results and continue to engage a diverse group of stakeholders in developing solutions. Directly following receipt of the preliminary 2011 assessment, we knew the results warranted early consultation with the Council and the fishing community. NOAA immediately took the unusual step of convening a working group with the Council to gather information and explore potential management implications. Further, the working group immediately scheduled a meeting with representatives from the fishing industry, leading scientists, regional Congressional staff, and others from the community in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, on December 9, 2011. That meeting was very productive and generated ideas we are currently exploring.

We have also developed a new webpage with the agency's latest Gulf of Maine cod news which can be found at www.nero.noaa.gov/nero/hotnews/gomcod/. This is one of several tools we will use to ensure we keep all interested parties informed and engaged.

I want to emphasize that at this point no decision has been made about management approaches for the 2012 fishing year, which will begin in May. While we are working closely with the Council to assess possible solutions, we cannot move forward until the peer review of our 2011 stock assessment is complete. We expect this report in late January 2012. We will continue to work with the Council to develop possible management alternatives, contingent upon final assessment results. I understand that fishermen need information as soon as possible to plan for their business year and while we cannot move forward with a management decision yet, we are

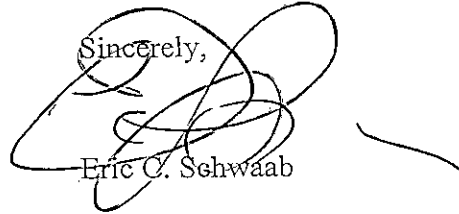
THE ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR
FOR FISHERIES



making every effort to include the fishing community in all of our discussions so they understand what options we are examining with the Council.

I want to reiterate that Secretary Bryson, Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere Dr. Jane Lubchenco, and I fully understand the potential severity of the situation, and we are committed to working with your office and all of our partners to ensure the sustainability of both the fishery and our fishing communities. I am happy to brief you or your staff on this at any time. Thank you for your leadership on this topic.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Eric C. Schwaab", written over the printed name. The signature is stylized and somewhat illegible due to its cursive nature.

Eric C. Schwaab