

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

February 1, 2012

The Honorable John E. Bryson
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20230

The Honorable Karen G. Mills
Administrator
U.S. Small Business Administration
409 3rd St, SW
Washington DC 20416

The Honorable Martin J. Gruenberg
Chairman
Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation
550 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20429

Dear Secretary Bryson, Administrator Mills, Chairman Gruenberg:

Cod is not only an iconic fish species in Massachusetts, but also is a key economic component of the New England groundfish fishery. The recent National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) stock assessment for the Gulf of Maine (GOM) cod, could result in devastating impacts to the New England fishing industry. From May 2010 to April 2011, commercial fishermen caught over 11,000 metric tons of GOM cod earning almost \$16 million, according to the New England Fishery Management Council. However, the current stock assessment shows a stock level of only 11,400 metric tons of GOM cod, which could reduce the annual catch limit (ACL) to one thousand metric tons, thereby crippling the New England groundfish fishery.

I commend NMFS' efforts to be transparent and communicate these findings with groundfishermen and managers by holding meetings and workshops to discuss these scientific findings. I also commend NMFS for proactively exploring the flexibility inherent in the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act to suggest creative solutions to keep groundfishermen on the water given the findings of this stock assessment. However, given the discrepancies between the previous stock assessment in 2008 and the current assessment, it is imperative that the best available science be used to improve the groundfish assessment in the next year. I encourage NMFS to act on the New England Fishery Management Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee recommendations to improve the data streams into the assessment, such as including data from the Marine Recreational Information Program, and to evaluate the characteristics of the Gulf of Maine cod stock including the structure, spatial distribution and dynamics of the stock.

The fishing pressure on a single species is only one variable that affects the health of its population. To more effectively assess the health of any given fishery, the entire ecosystem must be taken into account, including research on species interactions, water quality, and climate change. I encourage NMFS to increase efforts to employ ecosystem-based fishery management, which will reduce uncertainty in future stock assessments and contribute to the economic stability of the fishing industry.

In light of the ongoing struggle in our New England groundfish fishery, I commend the efforts by the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration (EDA) to evaluate the economic needs of the city of Gloucester, Massachusetts. This EDA report made several suggestions to help small fishing businesses expand their access to capital, including bringing together traditional and non-traditional lenders and exploring new alternative financial products to meet the particular financing needs of fishermen. Creative solutions to help these small fishing businesses will benefit all of Massachusetts' coastal communities. Therefore, I respectfully request that the EDA and the NMFS work together with the U.S. Small Business Administration and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation to explore these alternatives and find ways to connect lenders and their financial products, with the fishing industry and their financing needs. In addition, I request that you provide me with your analysis of financing alternatives and identify any legislative barriers that may prevent these potential financing mechanisms from helping fisherman.

Thank you for your assistance and cooperation in responding to this request. Should you have any questions about this request, please have your staff contact Heidi Geisz of the Natural Resources Committee Democratic Staff at 202-225-6065.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
Ranking Member
Committee on Natural Resources

CC:

The Honorable Jane Lubchenco
Under Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere and Administrator
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Mr. Sam Rauch
Acting Assistant Administrator for Fisheries
National Marine Fisheries Service