



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
The Under Secretary of Commerce  
for Oceans and Atmosphere  
Washington, D.C. 20230

JAN 30 2012

The Honorable Deval L. Patrick  
Governor  
Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
State House  
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Governor Patrick:

Thank you for your letter regarding the recent Gulf of Maine cod assessment. We certainly share your concern with the assessment results and are committed to aggressively evaluating the science, developing management responses, and taking action to help fishermen and fishing communities.

In light of the unexpected nature of these results and their potential implications, NOAA is taking steps to proactively identify and assess potential solutions. 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 obtain their views on how to address it. We also very much appreciate the participation and valuable contributions to date from the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries, as well as the Marine Fisheries Institute (MFI), in the stock assessment and other follow up work now underway.

Directly following receipt of the preliminary 2011 assessment, NOAA immediately convened 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. 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 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. We are working closely with the Council to assess possible solutions now that the peer review of the 2011 stock assessment is finalized. We are making every effort to include the fishing community in all of our discussions so they understand what options we are examining with the Council. We appreciate your offer for the Division of Marine Fisheries and MFI to continue to participate in this process. As we move forward, we will continue to rely on their expertise and others throughout the Region to develop solutions to these challenging problems.

I want to stress that delaying all new management actions pending completion of a new assessment later in the year would be very risky for the cod stock as well as the fishermen who depend on it. Some interim action will likely be warranted this spring, and you have my

THE ADMINISTRATOR



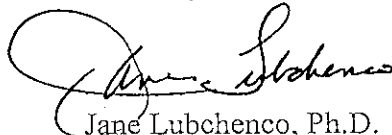
commitment that NOAA will do everything possible to minimize short-term impacts to the fishery while also minimizing the risk to the long-term sustainability of the stock, which would lead to severe and long-term economic consequences for the fishery and the region.

Finally, you raised your request for a fishery disaster declaration. We are still evaluating your previous request and expect to have an answer soon. Additionally, as decisions are made on critical management actions for the 2012 fishing year, we are also committed to evaluating rapidly whether additional economic assistance, including a fishery disaster declaration, is warranted. If it is warranted, we will take immediate action. We will continue to work with you, monitor this situation closely, and leave all options for economic assistance on the table.

I want to reiterate that Secretary John Bryson, acting Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Conservation and Management Eric Schwaab, 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 resource and our fishing communities. Thank you for your leadership on this topic.

If you have further questions, please contact John Gray, Director of NOAA's Office of Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs, at (202) 482-4981.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jane Lubchenco". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "L".

Jane Lubchenco, Ph.D.  
Under Secretary of Commerce  
for Oceans and Atmosphere