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CITY OF GLOUCESTER OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

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The Gloucester “Bridge Plan”: A Response to the New England Groundfisheries Crisis

On May 1st, the federal government imposed drastic reductions in allowable catch for several key groundfish stocks, including a 77% cut in high value Cod landings from the Gulf of Maine. These cuts threaten the economic viability and survival of not only the fishing fleets, but also of the processors, shoreside services, and fresh fish markets of the region as well. Multiple stakeholders in Gloucester have come together, under the leadership of Mayor Carolyn Kirk, to formulate a comprehensive transition or “bridge” plan to navigate through this crisis.

The goals of the plan are both to preserve the core assets of the fleets and the ports during the groundfish recovery period and to use this crisis as an opportunity to retool the industry through investments in sustainable, innovative businesses and practices going forward. The New England groundfisheries was declared a federal disaster area in the fall of 2012. Proposed federal and state contributions to implementation of the “bridge plan” include the following:

Transition Assistance to Fishermen and Crew

Transition assistance is needed for fishermen to meet immediate financial demands while their boats are idled at the docks, including unemployment insurance, mortgage protection, SBA programs to restructure debt, dockage and fuel relief, and other measures available to declared disaster areas.

Transition Assistance to Shoreside Businesses

Fishing fleets rely on support services of the region’s ports, including marine railways, engine repair, ice production, and marine supplies. Transition assistance is needed to stabilize these companies during the recovery period.

Redeployment of Fishing Boats as Research Vessels

Chartering of fishing boats as research vessels will accomplish three goals: a dramatic enhancement in the quality and amount of data used in running stock assessment models; a redeployment source of income for fishermen during the recovery period; and the opportunity to enhance geographically-dispersed data collection for numerous other ocean research programs.

Investment in a Sustainable, Innovative Fishery

New England fleets and ports, with a long history of adaptation and innovation, have the opportunity to invest in a shift from a high-volume, low-value fisheries to a high-value, low-volume fisheries with a lighter ecosystem footprint. Examples of current proposals include retrofitting of fishing boats for high-quality and flexible, multiple-species harvesting and fuel-efficiency; partnerships of fishermen and processors in live-fish markets, freeze-dried and other value-added products; expansion of local fresh catch programs to include institutional customers; processing of chitin and other products from lobster, crab, and clamshell waste and invasive green crabs; poly-culture of shellfish, kelp, seaweed and fish habitat restoration; hatchery stock enhancements; green chemistry solutions from the ocean biomass; and others.

Collaborative Review of Fisheries Management

Fishing fleets and ports are buffeted by short-term shifts in allowable catches and other management measures. A multiple-stakeholder, collaborative effort to propose better management approaches is needed to support sustainable fisheries and ecosystems, fishing fleets, ports, and access by consumers to healthy local fish and other seafood products.