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## United States Senate

January 7, 2015

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The Honorable Kathryn D. Sullivan, Ph.D.  
Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
1401 Constitution Avenue NW, Room 5128  
Washington, DC 20230

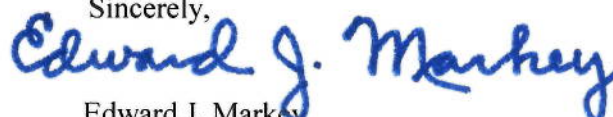
Dear Under Secretary Sullivan:

In December the New England Fishery Management Council (Council), with NOAA Fisheries Regional Administrator John Bullard's support, adopted several measures that would change the At-Sea Monitoring (ASM) program for groundfish sectors beginning in fishing year 2016. I'm writing to convey my support for efforts to reform the ASM program so that it is more effective and efficient while maintaining accountability and supporting the management needs to ensure a sustainable groundfish fishery.

The Council's recent motions on ASM reforms could help meet these goals as the Framework Adjustment 55 rule is reviewed and finalized. Included in the Council's actions was the recommendation to use information on discards and fishery performance from multiple years instead of a single fishing year to determine the total observer coverage rate. The Council also recommended to remove ASM coverage requirements for certain gillnet sector trips with low groundfish bycatch.

The transition to industry cost sharing of the groundfish ASM program is an additional burden on fishermen already struggling with low annual catch limits for cod. I have previously requested that your agency utilize authority provided by Congress through the Fiscal Year 2015 Appropriations process to cover such expenses in fishing year 2015 and continue to strongly support the deferment of ASM costs to the industry until program reforms are fully implemented.

I appreciate the efforts to find ways to lower the ASM program costs for fishing year 2016. I encourage NOAA Fisheries to continue to work with Congress, the Council and the fishing industry to find affordable ways to maintain the science and management tools needed to support healthy fisheries and the fishermen and coastal communities that depend on them.

Sincerely,  
  
Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator

cc: Eileen Sobeck, Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA  
John Bullard, Regional Administrator, NOAA Fisheries