



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

September 17, 2015

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REP. KOCZERA JOINS FISHERMEN'S CALL FOR BETTER SCIENCE AND BETTER FUNDING FOR GROUND FISH MONITORING

NEW BEDFORD – State Representative Robert Koczera (D-New Bedford) has joined Massachusetts officials and fishermen in calling for a reassessment of the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA)'s recent decision to shift the costs of federally-mandated At-Sea Monitoring expenses onto the shoulders of the struggling Massachusetts fishing fleet.

"NOAA's insistence on at-sea monitoring as the only means to reach observational requirements is symptomatic of a bureaucracy wedded to one approach, especially when science has demonstrated there are other alternatives of fishery management and data collection that can possibly better meet the short-term and long-term needs of the fishing industry and the monitoring program," stated Rep. Koczera.

"I would like to see NOAA reach out to local research organizations -- like UMD's School for Marine Science & Technology (SMAST) or the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute - - to bring together unbiased scientific research and local knowledge for alternative monitoring ideas," added Rep. Koczera.

"Our fishermen are seasoned professionals with years of expertise which is being disregarded in current discussions," added Rep. Koczera. "The ongoing disagreement between policy-makers and hands-on practitioners on the best approach underscores the need for a better understanding of current stock conditions and more research before a scientifically and statistically-sound monitoring program can be developed and implemented successfully."

In a recent letter to Secretary of Commerce Penny Prizker which highlighted his concern with the structure and rationale of the current at-sea monitoring program, Rep. Koczera also decried the anticipated effects of the cost-shift on the fishing fleet.

According to NOAA's recent assessment, each fishing vessel would have to absorb a \$710/day expense for an at-sea monitor. Collectively, this would lead to an industry cost \$2.6 million annually, with the dire prediction that 60% of the fishing fleet would have negative returns in the first year of implementation.

"For an industry that has been through a federally-recognized commercial failure, these actions equate to an ill-advised and insurmountable unfunded mandate that would cripple any progress towards sustainable recovery," said Rep. Koczera.

NOAA recently suggested that remaining "Bin 3" federal disaster funding be specifically allocated towards at-sea monitoring expenses. Governor Charlie Baker and the entire Massachusetts Congressional delegation are strongly opposed to this proposal.

"It is disingenuous to suggest this proposal is for the relief of the fishing industry, while, in truth, it would undercut the support system put in place to assist in their long-term viability," added Rep. Koczera. "I join with my colleagues in insisting that this would be an inappropriate use of the "Bin 3" allocation of disaster funding."

"The history of contention between the New England fishing fleet and NOAA is well known, but both have incentives for maintaining a healthy fishing industry and both agree that better information is needed to achieve that objective," said Rep. Koczera.

"However, shifting the cost of an unfunded mandate onto the backs of the fishing industry – an indispensable partner in the federal government's efforts to ensure a thriving fishery – is NOT how we will reach that objective," added Rep. Koczera.

"If NOAA is serious in this commitment, it should address the cost-effectiveness concerns of the at-sea monitoring program, be open to alternative strategies of meeting monitoring goals, and commit appropriate federal funding to prevent this unjust cost-shift to the fishing fleet," concluded Rep. Koczera.

A copy of Rep. Koczera's letter to the Secretary of Commerce is attached.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT REP. KOCZERA'S OFFICE AT 617-722-2582
