



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STATE HOUSE, BOSTON 02133-1054

ROBERT M. KOCZERA
REPRESENTATIVE
11TH BRISTOL DISTRICT
119 JARRY STREET
NEW BEDFORD, MA 02746
HOME: (508) 998-8041

Committees:
Vice Chair, Steering, Policy and Scheduling
Ways and Means
Education
Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture

ROOM 448, STATE HOUSE
TEL: (617) 722-2682
FAX: (617) 722-2879
Robert.Koczera@mahouse.gov

September 10, 2015

The Honorable Penny Prizker
Secretary of Commerce
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Madame Secretary:

As a long-time state representative for the fishing port city of New Bedford, Massachusetts, I must add my voice to the call of Governor Baker and the Massachusetts Congressional delegation for a reassessment of recent decisions made by the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA) Fisheries Service to shift the costs of the At-Sea Monitoring (ASM) program of the Northeast Fishery to the New England Groundfish Fishermen.

The history of contention between the New England fishing fleet and NOAA is well known, but we can agree that each side has incentives to maintain a healthy fishing industry and both agree that better information is needed to reach that objective. NOAA's insistence on at-sea monitoring as the only means to reach that goal 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 potentially better meet the needs of the fishing industry and the monitoring program. This ongoing disagreement between policy-makers and the hands-on practitioners on the best approach underscores the need for a clearer understanding of current conditions and more research before a successful, scientifically and statistically-sound monitoring program can be developed and implemented.

However, despite these concerns regarding financial viability, system utility, and catch assessment data accuracy, **NOAA has continued with the current structure of the ASM program without providing a viable funding source to cover the ongoing costs.**

NOAA's own assessment predicts a \$710/day cost for the fishermen individually, a collective industry expense of \$2.6 million, and the dire expectation that 60% of the fishing fleet would have negative returns as a result of a year's implementation of this monitoring program.

For an industry that has been through a federally-recognized commercial failure and is a recipient of federal disaster aid, **these actions equate to an ill-advised and insurmountable unfunded mandate that would cripple any progress towards sustainable recovery.**

In response to the vocal outcry over costs, NOAA Fisheries has now suggested that the federal disaster funding intended to help fishermen adapt and recover, instead be used to specifically address ASM expenses. Again, I join Governor Baker and our Congressional leaders in insisting this would be an inappropriate use of the "Bin 3" allocation of disaster funding. It is disingenuous to suggest this move is for the relief of the fishing industry, while, in truth, it would undercut the support system put in place to assist their long-term viability.

As my colleagues have done, I would urge you to direct NOAA Fisheries to address the cost-effectiveness concerns of the At-Sea Monitoring program, consider alternative strategies to better meet monitoring objectives, and commit appropriate federal funding to prevent the cost of the current ASM program from unjustly shifting to the fishing fleet.

These fishermen are the backbone of New Bedford's identity and economy. They are seasoned professionals. They understand, first-hand, that the sea is an ever-changing, living ecosystem that should be respected and protected. What they are asking is for their expertise to be acknowledged and their interests to be considered seriously. Creating effective monitoring systems should be a collaborative effort between scientific research and hands-on experience.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this matter. I am hopeful your leadership will lead to a fair resolution.

Sincerely,



Robert M. Koczera
State Representative, 11th Bristol District
City of New Bedford & Town of Acushnet

cc: Governor Charles Baker
Senator Elizabeth Warren
Senator Edward Markey
Congressman William Keating