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Northeast Fishery Sectors IV
Sector Representative: Vito Giacalone
10 Witham Street
Gloucester, MA 01930

Dear Vito:

I write you following an article recently published in the Boston Globe regarding the initial results of the first year of the planned multi-year, Division of Marine Fisheries' (DMF) Gulf of Maine Cod Industry-Based Survey (IBS). As the Baker-Polito Administration greatly appreciates our strong working relationship with Massachusetts' commercial fishing industry, we'd like to clarify the status of the IBS and our other efforts to improve the science behind federal stock assessments.

Since taking office, the Administration has been dedicated to working with the commercial fishing industry to address its concerns about Gulf of Maine cod stock assessments in a scientifically credible manner. For this reason, the Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) planned a multi-pronged approach to study the abundance and distribution of cod in the southwestern part of the Gulf of Maine where the majority of cod are now located. DMF has concluded the first year of its multi-year IBS and has embarked on the survey's second year this month. The survey was developed in conjunction with the fishing industry and research community to address Administration and industry concerns about the stock assessment and to improve the science on which the assessment is based.

DMF plans to calculate IBS swept-area biomass estimates after completing an experiment to determine the amount of fish passing beneath the IBS trawl net. Additionally, because swept-area biomass estimates are relevant to the setting of catch limits based on stock size, the Administration has also funded the UMass Dartmouth School for Marine Science and Technology (SMAST) Video Trawl Survey. Using fishermen's guidance, the survey targets sites with known or suspected seasonal cod aggregations. These additional efforts will complement the IBS by providing additional information on cod abundance and addressing any concerns about the randomized survey design of the IBS.

The Administration is keenly aware of the difficult issues facing the groundfish industry and anticipates that obtaining biomass estimates from the IBS and SMAST Video Trawl Survey will allow an improved understanding and determination of allowable catches.

While it is too early to have enough data to make definitive conclusions about the status of the Gulf of Maine cod, the Administration anticipates the IBS data will be a helpful resource for both the fishing and research communities. DMF is making monthly maps of the spatial distribution of each groundfish species available to the public as a tool for fishermen in their efforts to identify times and areas where high-quota stocks can be caught without catching "choke" stocks, like cod.

We look forward to continuing to collect critical information that improves the assessment, management and sustainable harvest of this important cod resource. The Administration remains committed to supporting the Commonwealth's vibrant and economically significant commercial fishing industry and the countless individuals, families, and communities who rely upon the future viability of the industry.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Matthew A. Beaton".

Matthew A. Beaton
Secretary