



COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
THE GENERAL COURT
STATE HOUSE, BOSTON 02133-1053

June 30th, 2020

The Honorable Neil Jacobs, Ph.D.
Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Environmental Observation and Prediction
Acting Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW, Room 5128
Washington, DC 20230

Mr. Michael Pentony
Regional Administrator
National Marine Fisheries Service, Greater Atlantic Region
55 Great Republic Drive
Gloucester, MA 01930

Dr. Jon Hare
Science and Research Director
Northeast Fisheries Science Center
166 Water Street
Woods Hole, MA 0254

Dear Under Secretary Jacobs, Mr. Pentony, and Dr. Hare:

The current waiver from the requirement of At Sea Monitoring (ASM) in the Northeast groundfishery is a critically important safeguard not only for the health and safety of those engaged in this fishery, but also for preventing the spread of the COVID-19 virus, and should not be ended as our nation continues to confront devastating impacts of this disease. Accordingly, I write to join with Congressmen Moulton and Congressman Keating and the Massachusetts Fishing Partnership to request that you extend this waiver and the essential health protections that it provides.

Clearly the men and women engaged in commercial fishing are at significant and cognizable risk from infection from COVID-19 due to the inherent conditions of their working environment at sea, which requires them to be close to each other in confined wheelhouses and crew spaces, and working in close proximity to each other on decks to haul and tend gear, sort and stow fish, and maintain and repair the equipment necessary to the operation of a fishing vessel. Because of these known conditions that are conducive to the spread of COVID-19, these harvesters have taken substantial steps to protect themselves from that threat, and they continue to do so. They should not now be forced to contend with the new and serious threat to their health posed by the imposition on board vessels of observers, who have not been part of those

efforts and could well become agents and victims of viral transmission as they move between vessels in the groundfish fleet. While the data collected by these observers is neither irrelevant nor without some value, these attributes are not outweighed by the clear health threat to themselves, vessel crews, and the public posed by requiring ASM at this time.

Our nation continues to witness and experience tragic loss of life, human suffering and economic devastation from the COVID-19 virus, and across the country rates of transmission in many states are rising sharply, demonstrating the importance of taking and continuing practical steps to prevent or mitigate that transmission. Extending the waiver from ASM is one of those steps, and one that should continue in the face of the ongoing threat we must confront effectively.

Thank you for your attention to this request, and please do not hesitate to contact me if I may be of further assistance.

Sincerely,


Senate Minority Leader Bruce Tarr

CC: Governor Baker
Senator Warren
Senator Markey
Massachusetts Congressional Delegation
Massachusetts Coastal Caucus
Mayor Theken
Mayor Walsh
Gloucester City Council
New England Fishery Management Council
Massachusetts Director of Marine Fisheries McKiernan
Massachusetts Fisherman's Partnership
Northeast Seafood Coalition