



December 11, 2009

The Honorable Deval Patrick
Governor of Massachusetts
Office of the Governor
State House, Room 360
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Governor Patrick:

I am writing to urge the state to take immediate action to save our commercial fishing industry. Over the past months, I have had the opportunity to visit New Bedford several times and have spoken to many struggling fishermen. The industry is in crisis - on the brink of an economic disaster - and you and your administration must make it a priority to address this crisis.

Year after year, the groundfish and scallop industries in Massachusetts have suffered under the weight of arbitrary and overly restrictive regulations that have put their future at risk.

Unfortunately, new regulations that go into effect in the spring of 2010 will have a devastating impact on our state's economy. The New England Management Council's recent decision to reduce the number of days at sea for the scallop industry, from 39 to 29 days, will result in a loss of \$83 million at the docks with a multiplier effect of \$250 million. In addition, the new rules for the groundfish industry, which include changing from a days-at-sea system to a catch-share system, will result in a loss of \$300 million with a multiplier effect of \$1 billion. These numbers are staggering and are the result of decisions based on inaccurate data and a flawed stock rebuilding timeframe.

Congressman Barney Frank has recognized the damage that these unscientific decisions will have on the fishing communities along the east coast and has been waging an uphill battle against the federal regulations. He should be lauded for his work and for convening a federal meeting with the stakeholders along the east coast in order to save the industry. I urge you to show leadership on this issue by convening a similar fishing summit with the other New England Governors. By acting quickly, your collective weight can effect the crucial changes needed to save the industry.

The state must do its part to help save this industry. Without immediate action, the next fishing season will open with new rules that will further crush a bleeding industry to a point beyond recovery. At a minimum, I urge you to:

1. Call for a moratorium on the new rules

The state must work with the federal delegation and the White House to allow the fishing industry to operate under the 2009 rules until new rules are established that balance the economic needs of the communities with the needs of conservation measures. Currently, the rules do not take into account the economic impact on the affected businesses and the regional economy.

2. Advocate for changes to the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act

The state must work with our congressional delegation and the White House to amend the Magnuson Act to change the unrealistic 10-year stock rebuilding timeframe.

3. Commission a scientific study of the groundfish

The state must immediately commission a scientific study of the groundfish stock. Using independent scientific analyses has been an effective strategy for the scallop industry and we must do the same for the groundfish industry. This study has been “talked” about before but it has not been done. Time is of the essence and the state should use its current resources to get it done.

4. Appoint commercial fishing representatives to the New England Fishery Management Council

The commercial fishing industry does not have adequate representation on the New England Fishery Management Council. Future state appointments should represent the industry so they have a voice in the decisions that are being made.

There are over 300,000 people out of work in Massachusetts. The unemployment rates in New Bedford and Gloucester are already above the state average. The regions can not tolerate more job losses. This is an immediate and critical time for an industry on the brink of disaster and we have a short window of opportunity to work on behalf of the generations of Massachusetts families who have made this a way of life in our state. The 2010 fishing season is just around the corner. The time to act is now.

Sincerely,

Charles D. Baker