

POSITION STATEMENT

Commercial Fishing Industry

The New Bedford Area Chamber of Commerce is a non-profit business advocacy and economic development organization. It has a diverse membership base of 1,000 businesses – primarily small and medium size - in the SouthCoast region of Massachusetts. This policy position is intended to serve as guidelines for the Chamber's Government Affairs efforts and has been reviewed and approved by the Chamber's Government Affairs Committee and Board of Directors.

Adopted: May 27, 2010

Background: The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) is the principal law governing marine fisheries in the United States. It was originally adopted to extend control of U.S. waters to 200 nautical miles in the ocean; to phase out foreign fishing activities within this zone; to prevent overfishing, especially by foreign fleets; to allow overfished stocks to recover; and to conserve and manage fishery resources. Congress passed the original Magnuson Act in 1976. It has since been amended several times, most recently in 2006.

This year, the groundfishery began operating under a new management approach, a catch share system known as sector management. The implementation of these new sector management regulations coincide with new mandates under the MSA requiring fishery management plans to include strict annual catch limits (ACLs) in fisheries subject to overfishing. Once fishermen reach an ACL for any of the 19 fish stocks within the groundfish multispecies fishery management complex, the entire fishery will be shut down for the remainder of the year. Further complicating this concern is that individual sectors, which are comprised of self-selecting groups of fishermen, will have to cease operations when the sector as a whole catches its allocated quota of any of the stocks.

This problem is compounded because certain fish stocks within the groundfishery face 2010 ACLs which are mere fractions of what the catch levels were in 2009. These fish, which have come to be known as “choke stocks” include Pollock (75% reduction from the 2009 level), Gulf of Maine winter flounder (61% reduction), southern New England yellowtail flounder (38% reduction), Gulf of Maine cod (15% reduction), and Georges Bank yellowtail flounder (14% reduction) also face significant cuts.

In 2007 (the last year for which data is available) only 27% of the total allowable catch was harvested, because of regulatory measure designed to protect the weakest stocks. Thus 73% of the allowable, sustainable catch was left in the ocean, costing our fishermen and our coastal economies approximately \$500 million. Conservative estimates from industry experts predict that 50% of the fishing vessels will no longer be utilized. The Port of New Bedford/Fairhaven is home to over 500 fishing vessels of which 50% of the vessels are draggers. The lack of sufficient ACLs for groundfish will inevitably and significantly downsize the fleet and trigger a domino effect that would negatively impact the New Bedford economy.

Position: The New Bedford Area Chamber of Commerce strongly supports policies that promote and support the region's commercial fishing industry. New Bedford's commercial fishing industry includes over 200 businesses that employ over 4,000 people and creates a \$1 billion dollar economic impact.

The Chamber encourages the following:

- Immediate implementation of emergency regulations to increase the 2010 annual catch limits (ACL) for the nineteen fish stocks in this multispecies fishery.
- Conducting an immediate independent review of the status of the stocks in New England. Some stock assessments are based upon 2007 analyses. Others are pending (e.g., pollack). Some do not make sense (e.g., skate). The implementation of any management plan will require an overview of the current status of stocks.
- Programmatic analysis to review budget allocations. Emergency funds need to be provided to disaffected fishermen and municipalities. Buy-back programs, retraining, and permit banks also need to be considered.

While this statement is policy as of the effective date of this document, the Chamber reserves the right to adopt changes and make modifications and additions to its policies, and will continue to monitor issues as they develop. Please contact Roy Nascimento, President & CEO at (508) 999-5231 with any questions regarding this policy position.