

TO: Senator John Kerry, Senator Scott Brown, Congressman Barney Frank, Congressman Edward Markey, Congressman William Keating, Congressman John Tierney, Congressman Stephen Lynch, and Congressman Jim McGovern

RE: Please help fishermen on groundfish management provisions being considered by the New England Fishery Management Council

Dear Senators Kerry and Brown, and Congressmen Frank, Markey, Keating, Tierney, Lynch, and McGovern:

I am writing to you all today as follow-up on questions that were asked of me at the October 3rd field hearing of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Technology convened by Sen. Kerry in Boston with NOAA Administrator Jane Lubchenco and Assistant Administrator Eric Schwaab participating. The questions regarded ways that the Senate and others can help support Massachusetts – and in fact all New England – fishermen.

The short answer is, please help us maintain the character and diversity of New England’s fishing fleet by working with us to get the New England Fishery Management Council to prioritize and move ahead with Groundfish Amendment 18 – the ‘Fleet Diversity Amendment.’

Before the sector plans were implemented here in New England, having learned from other communities about the rapid consolidation of the fishing industry in the aftermath of Catch Share programs, many of us spoke up. I, along with other fishermen, asked the New England Fishery Management Council to put in place measures that will protect fleet diversity. In fact, this was one of the stated objectives in Amendment 16, which enacted Catch Shares in a system called “sector management.” Nevertheless, the new management plan went forward without such protections. Just one year into the program, the loss of fleet diversity and the rapid consolidation we were worried about have indeed become a reality. Over the past year, we have continued asking the Council to address this issue. The Council has finally responded by beginning a new amendment – the Fleet Diversity Amendment 18 – which makes it possible to implement appropriate protections in the context of sectors and Amendment 16.

The only way that this work will actually get done is if the Council agrees to make this amendment a priority at their next meeting in Newport, RI on November 15th to the 17th. Please join me and my fellow fishermen in Sector 10 and throughout New England in support of the Fleet Diversity Amendment 18 as a Council priority. We really need your help now to keep the Council on task and get this work done.

The Council is so close to starting their public scoping process for the Fleet Diversity Amendment, yet they nearly voted to stop working on it altogether this week at the groundfish committee meeting in Plymouth, MA. There are a lot of important things on the Council’s plate these days – affordable monitoring being another big one. But, we

can't let this be an excuse to allow the current system to destroy the diversity of our communities by allowing consolidation of fishing quotas by those who received the most allocation or have the most money, which opens the door to non-fishermen controlling who fishes for New England groundfish. This isn't a big boat versus small boat issue. It's not about draggers versus gillnetters versus hook fishermen. It's about what the New England fishing industry will look like, which is a matter of critical importance to everyone in the fishery. Fishermen in other parts of this country who have lived through quota management always say that you have to protect fleet diversity from the beginning. After a few years, when the horse is out of the barn, there's no way to effectively reverse excessive consolidation. We have to make this amendment a priority now.

I'm a little concerned when I hear a select few people these days saying that we need stability. I agree with one fishermen who said, stability means 'I win, you lose, get over it.' When I hear that we need stability, I wonder "stability for who?" I know that my fishing business won't be very stable if we don't protect fleet diversity as soon as we possibly can.

Thankfully, we have a few die-hard supporters of fleet diversity on the Council – David Goethel and Doug Grout from New Hampshire, and our very own David Pierce from Massachusetts DMF. Without people like them, we wouldn't have gotten the Fleet Diversity Amendment 18 to where it is today. Now the Council needs to hold a series of public meetings all along the coast so that fishermen can speak up about why fleet diversity is important and offer new ideas for what we can do about it. Then, this Council needs to act on those ideas – not sweep them under the rug.

This is why Massachusetts fishermen, and fishermen from all over New England, need your help right now to hold the Council members accountable to their own commitment to address fleet diversity. In fact, a diverse fleet is called for in the National Standards of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, and is one of the original objectives of Amendment 16 – the very action that created sectors. If we push the Fleet Diversity Amendment 18 off to the side under the pretext of 'stability' then this system will fail to truly serve the fishermen, and a lot of us will continue to fall through the cracks.

Please join me and my fellow fishermen at the Council meeting in Newport, RI on November 15 to 17 when they'll vote on priorities for the next year. With your help and testimony, we can keep the focus on what really matters for our communities and for the fish – a diverse fishing fleet.

Thank you, and feel free to get in touch with me anytime to discuss this important issue.

Sincerely,

Stephen Welch
Commercial Fisherman
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Signed in support by:

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