



CITY OF NEW BEDFORD

JONATHAN F. MITCHELL, MAYOR

January 31, 2012

C.M. "Rip" Cunningham
Chairman, New England Fisheries Management Council
75 Wilsondale Street
Dover, MA 02030

Dear Mr. Cunningham:

As the newly inaugurated Mayor of New Bedford, I write to express my deep concern about the Northeast Fisheries Science Center ("NEFSC")'s stock assessments and their potential impact on New England's fishing communities, including New Bedford.

Proper management of groundfish, scallops, and pelagic fish is critical to New Bedford. The ex-vessel value of landings in New Bedford amounts to \$300 million a year. By the time the fish are processed and leave New Bedford, they are worth \$1.4 billion. These are more than statistics. In New Bedford, a thriving fishing industry means jobs, livelihoods, and a way of life. The same is true for our sister ports from Rhode Island to Gloucester to northern Maine.

New Bedford relies on the New England Fishery Management Council ("Council") to ensure the necessary balance between optimum yield and conservation. If catches are too high, they will not be sustainable. If catches are too low, the resource is wasted.

We have grave concerns about the soundness of the data being collected, NEFSC's stock assessments, and the decisions that flow from them. The Council has calculated that the loss of Gulf of Maine cod landings would amount to a \$100 million loss to our economy. The loss of haddock that could be caught within conservation bounds but are not caught is an additional loss of hundreds of millions of dollars. Moreover, the buffers instituted to prevent relatively small amounts of overfishing are also valued at hundreds of millions of dollars.

The case of Gulf of Maine cod particularly exemplifies our concerns about NEFSC's methodologies. The stock assessment does not appear to be complete. There is no scientific consensus regarding the information given to the Council. At the same time, the assessment leaves out critical considerations, such as the migration patterns of cod, the implications of increasing catch per unit of effort, and the surveys conducted by the Massachusetts Department of Marine Fisheries.

The tremendous uncertainty about a well-studied species is, to say the least, discomfoting. We are pleased that the Council will be looking at some interim measures, but this is really not enough. We need to develop greater confidence in stock assessments.

We are counting on our congressional delegation to work with NOAA to develop new approaches and procedures to establish this confidence. I also remind the Council that the Massachusetts Marine Fisheries Institute has indicated to the Assistant Administrator that it would assist in improving the approach to stock assessment.

As you consider interim measures relating to Gulf of Maine cod, I ask you to take steps to ensure that New England's fishing communities have the maximum possible confidence in all future stock assessments, and that their voices are heard in a timely manner.

I look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,



Jonathan F. Mitchell
Mayor