

John Bullard's Listening Sessions and Industry Meetings

#4

August, 2012 – February, 2013

Annapolis, MD	New Bedford, MA
Philadelphia, PA	Portland, ME
East Setauket, NY	Ellsworth, ME
Surf City, NJ	Portsmouth, NH
Barnegat Light, NJ	Seabrook, NH
Gloucester, MA	Pt. Judith, RI
Scituate, MA	Manteo, NC
Chatham, MA	Hampton Roads, VA
Boston, MA	

More than 20 meetings and public listening sessions were held with approximately 550 fishermen plus other stakeholders in 17 regional ports. Mr. Bullard wanted to hear answers to two questions: what are the top concerns for the fisheries and what does success look like for the fisheries? These are the major themes he heard:

Vision of the Fishery

- Need to consider catch composition, vessel sizes, and ownership structures, and how each should be determined
- To avoid further fleet consolidation, fishermen should be allowed to fish for a variety of species and to keep all that they catch
- Large vessels are depleting in-shore stocks and should be limited in their abilities to fish in near shore waters

Science and Research

- NOAA Fisheries science is flawed, particularly surveys and stock assessments
- Fishermen need to be more engaged in the science that underlies regulatory decision-making
- Need to explain better how survey and other data are incorporated into stock assessments
- Outdated scientific models are used
- Need to engage fisheries scientists and fishermen in plain language dialogues
- Need external review of government science
- The R/V Bigelow samples too far off-shore and does not use appropriate gear to produce reliable results
- Surveys should be undertaken by a fleet of NEMAP fishing vessels and fishermen -- best way to bring credibility to the science and buy-in from fishermen
- Need more funding for cooperative research

Ecosystem Management and Climate Change

- Changing environmental conditions are producing unusual fish migration patterns, and therefore displacement of fishing effort, that need to be considered in future regulations
- Predator/prey interactions need greater attention in the regulatory arena
- Natural cycles of distribution and abundance should be considered in fishery management decision-making

- Need to move away from single species management to ecosystem management to reduce predators and increase valuable stocks
- Need to protect food sources and habitats to foster healthy fish populations
- Employ an ecosystem-based approach that includes people as a factor in the successful evaluation of the ocean environment

Lowering Costs

- Dire need to reduce costs – observers, assumed discards, quota shares – for fishermen
- Fishermen simply cannot afford to pay for at-sea monitors in 2013
- Need funding for the equipment required to implement electronic monitoring

Increasing Revenues

- Need to open some closed areas, such as Closed Area II, to provide access to more abundant and healthier stocks
- Too much quota is not able to be harvested - need to find ways to enable fishermen to catch their full allocations
- The continuous fluctuations in annual catch limits cause an inability to undertake effective business planning
- Fishermen need increased access to closed areas in order to fish different species and different gear types
- Offshore closures should be opened to encourage large vessels to fish offshore
- Difficult for small vessels to make up lost revenue from closed areas
- Regulations enacted to protect species listed under the Endangered Species Act often stay in effect after populations of the listed species have recovered. This unnecessarily limits fishermen's abilities to fully harvest their fish quotas
- Industry needs more notice of pending closures that are based on compliance issues
- Need to address the inequality of the allocation of commercial catch quotas among states
- Need more fish landed to keep auctions open and shore-side infrastructure functional
- Need a diverse fleet to maintain market share and a sustainable marine environment

Current Management Issues

- Management measures take too long to develop, causing an inability for the Agency to react and manage in real time
- Some management decisions are being made based on poor science and fear of legal action against the Agency
- Management needs to look at long-term trends, not just provide knee-jerk reactions
- Local fishermen accepted and implemented input controls (days-at sea) early to conserve stocks – feel their commitment and efforts to conserving stocks are unrecognized
- Significant opposition from small vessels and recreational community about reopening the Western Gulf of Maine Closed Area – need to protect spawning fish and habitat
- Catch shares should have been based on permits versus catch history
- There are an insufficient number of harbor porpoise takes to warrant a closure
- Some fishermen prefer input (days-at sea) controls to catch shares
- Need to revisit Magnuson-Stevens Act to incorporate more flexibility

Safety and New Entries

- Significant safety concerns are associated with an aging fleet coupled with the inability to undertake effective long-term business planning
- Need funding and resources for people who are interested in joining the commercial fishing industry

Regional Issues

Mid-Atlantic

- Needs greater attention from the Agency about their particular concerns
- Bluefin tuna allocation needs to be more fairly distributed among Northeast and Mid-Atlantic fishermen - quota could be set on a monthly basis
- Both fishermen and fish species are being displaced by impacts of regulatory and environmental changes
- Charter industry should be managed differently than the commercial fisheries

Maine

- Greater diversification needed between the lobster and groundfish fisheries
- American lobster processing industry needs to become more competitive against Canadian companies in terms of product forms, marketing, and distribution

Recreational Fisheries

- Need to establish the recreational daily bag limits early in the calendar year to allow fishermen to create effective business plans
- The methods used to survey the recreational sector are flawed and insufficient
- Ways to enable recreational fishermen to catch their underutilized quota need to be developed
- The charter industry should be considered when trip limits are established
- Recreational and commercial should be treated individually but allocated quota in the same way
- The Western Gulf of Maine Closure area should be maintained to protect spawning cod

Other

- The industry expressed appreciation for John Bullard's willingness to meet with fishermen in their home ports
- The fishing industry needs help from NOAA to market under-utilized species to the public
- If available, disaster funding should be given to fishermen who lost their vessels and businesses
- Need to develop opportunities in aquaculture for fishermen