



#16

Petition in support Efforts to Update Closed Areas

June 14, 2013

Dear Council Members:



Organizations from various environmental communities have solicited online signatures far and wide, from thousands of people around the globe, in a last-minute effort to oppose to the hard work done by the NEFMC and its committees to update regulations and provide access to closed areas.

We would like to call to your attention to the 500+ petitions signed and the 300+ email sent to representatives in Congress in support of these changes from individuals who will **actually be affected** by these changes.

The cause for concern amongst these individuals is not trivial. Thousands of already-struggling families are worried about the future of their communities and livelihood.

These individuals are not unfamiliar with the history and current realities of the fisheries. They are the lifeblood of communities and economies along the Atlantic coast. In their cities and towns, the fisheries provide thousands of jobs in areas in employment might otherwise be lacking or absent. They are writing because their family, neighbors, and friends depend on the fisheries.

We hope that you will take a few minutes to review their correspondence, as it relays a serious concern for the future of many struggling communities along our coastline.

A complete list of signers will be provided to the Council at the upcoming meeting.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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Text of the Petition:

After years of analysis of the most up-to-date scientific data, the New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) is considering modifications to the boundaries of areas in Georges Bank currently closed to scallop and groundfish fishing. The Council determined that these borders, closed since the mid-1990s, should be redefined in light of new information on habitat and changes in fisheries management. The Council will be implementing changes through the Omnibus Habitat Amendment, Framework 48, and other actions to protect essential habitat and again allow fishermen and scallopers to access these productive fishing grounds.

Despite extensive new evidence indicating that the closed areas are located in the wrong places to protect marine habitats, environmental organizations like the Pew Environment Group and the Conservation Law Foundation have defended the status quo. Deploying hyperbolic headlines like "Time is Running Out for New England's Iconic Groundfish," these groups are ignoring solid, peer-reviewed science indicating that these modifications will actually provide a net benefit for New England marine habitats while allowing fishermen and scallopers to harvest the resource at sustainable levels.

We support a science-based fishery management policy that takes into account both the most recent scientific data, as well as the socioeconomic well-being of fishing communities, as required by the Magnuson-Stevens Act. Many fishermen, facing economic hardship and potential unemployment after severe cuts in fishing quota, are looking for relief, which these proposals can provide.

We urge the Council and NOAA to resist pressure from environmental groups to stop the opening of productive scalloping and fishing grounds.