

Ms. Pat Kurkul, Regional Administrator
National Marine Fisheries Service
Northeast Regional Office
55 Great Republic Drive
Gloucester, MA 01930

Dear Pat:

I am writing today on behalf of the Recreational Fishing Alliance's 5,000 direct and affiliate New England members to ask that you and the Council rescind access to groundfish closed areas by midwater trawl vessels. Recent analysis of observer data indicates that the one-percent threshold outlined in Framework 18 has been reached, and these boats should no longer be allowed into closed areas.

If these vessels wish to regain access, they should be required to apply for, and obtain, an Exempted Fisheries Permit, and 100 percent observer coverage should be mandated. If these vessels are observed to be fishing and catching cleanly, only then should they be allowed continued access. This is the process commercial groundfishermen must go through, and it is only equitable that midwater trawlers do the same.

Our groundfish resource is incredibly important to recreational fishermen and the sport fishing industry here in New England, but this resource will continue to remain in jeopardy as long as the midwater vessels continue to operate in groundfish closed areas with little or no oversight. The RFA encourages you to take whatever action is necessary to redirect these vessels to other areas as soon as possible.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Barry Gibson
New England Regional Director
Recreational Fishing Alliance

cc: Paul Howard, NEFMC